Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai Volume2

source : https://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Tasogare-iro_no_Uta_Tsukai:Volume2

These are the illustrations included in the second volume of Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai.

黄昏色の詠使いII

奏でる少女の道行きは

わたしは逃げた。世界から目を背けて。大切な人を救わずに、逃げろと言われて、ただ怯えて。……でも。それからずっと心の中で、声が響いている。

――本当に何も、できなかったの？――

心に想い描いた世界を招き寄せる召喚術・名詠式。その専修学校トレミア・アカデミーの夏期移動教室で、原因不明の石化事件が発生した。

類希な名詠式の力を持つクルーエルは、強すぎる己の力を使うのをためらっていた。しかし、彼女は級友たちの危機に直面し、ある選択を迫られる。そして、もうひとり。名詠式を学びながら、名詠士ならざる才能を秘めたエイダ。彼女もまた、事件を通じて自分の生い立ちと向き合うことになる……。自分の進むべき道を探す、召喚ファンタジー第２弾！

174-2
¥580

奏でる少女の道行きは
黄昏色の詠使いII
細音啓

富士見ファンタジア文庫

Oh Lesion
dass yenwos da quo fenne
——教えてください。わたしの進むべき道はどこにあるのか——
黄昏色の詠使いII
奏でる少女の道行きは

「あんたに作り笑いは
似合わないよ」
Serges Ophelia
Kate LeoSuel
「……頼りなくて本当に、
ごめんなさい」
あるのなら、恐がらない」

「自分を信じられないなんて
言わないでください」
Neight Yehlemihas
「今、わたしにできることが
Kluele Sophi Net

『お前が、まだ気づかないだけだ。
この道は、きっと誰かを……』
Ada Yung

登場人物に関する資料

名詠式専修学校　トレミア・アカデミー
1年生担任・ケイト教師補のメモより

触媒の暴走事件の後始末も落ち着いて、やっと夏季休暇らしくなってきた。
けど、これから一大イベントの夏期集中補講が待っている。
校舎は補修中なので、移動教室のようになる可能性が高い。
わたしのクラスの子たちは、良い子たちだけれど個性が強すぎる部分もある。問題を起さないように、しっかり指導しなくっちゃ！

●授業用のレジュメ

・名詠式の基本のおさらい
『Keinez』・『Ruguz』・『Surisuz』・『Beorc』・『Arzus』の五色に分類される物体転移術。
呼び出したいものと同じ色の触媒を介し、名前を讃美し詠うことで招き寄せるので名詠式という。基本的に５色全ての名詠式をマスターすること、五色以外の名詠式の確立は不可能。
※上記の基本事項を小テストに出すこと。
ネイトの夜色名詠についての質問があった場合も想定しておくこと。

・反唱に関して祓名民の説明をするか？

●生徒に関するメモ

ネイト・イェレミーアス

飛び級編入してきた13歳。母親が研究していたという異端の夜色名詠を独自に勉強中。基本的には優しい子だけれど、名詠式のことになるとガンコ。いろいろな意味で特に指導が必要になるので、要注意

クルーエル・ソフィネット

16歳。専攻は赤色名詠。女子のクラス委員。面倒見がよくて、明るい性格。わたしから見て、特筆すべき問題は特になし。転入生のネイトを、特によく気にかけている様子

ミオ・レンティア

16歳。専攻は緑色名詠。うちのクラスでは一番の成績優秀者。クルーエルと仲よし。その流れでネイトともよく一緒にいる

ネイトの夜色名詠の成功率はまだ低い。何が名詠されるのかも予測しにくいので注意！

●その他の特記事項

カインツ・アーウィンケル

当校のOBで、五色全ての名詠式をマスターした生きる伝説。虹色名詠士の異名を持つ。どうやらネイトと何か関係があるらしい。個人的にも憧れの人なので、いつかお話できる機会があるといいな

あとがき。

ど、どうから!! … どうにか!!
黄昏2巻も 絵描き側として
お供できたようです。

担当さんに感謝。
本当に ありがとうございました。

竹田美穂

http://www.nezicaplant.com/

Dream Play: I Pray, Let Me Redo That Day, That Time

The whole world before my eyes was engulfed by flames.

From the recital contest, laughing voices resounded. Or at least they should have— In a second, the laughter changed to screams.

A nightmare. Yes, it was a manifestation of fear that probably couldn't exist in reality.

The school buildings, the campus, the plaza. Unrelenting flames burned everywhere the eye could see . The tongues of flame danced as they were stirred up by a strong wind and from those coals, more fire sprouted.

From the students came unstopping screams, jeers, and crying voices. Mixed in with that were the teachers' hurried orders.

Chaos gave birth to more chaos and fear caused more fear to arise.

The three-headed monster that appeared from the shadow of the school building had injured students. In order to protect the students, teachers had sustained injuries. The chains of sacrifice. The spiral of pain.

……I averted my eyes from all that and ran away.

I wasn't doing anything bad. I was simply following instructions to take refuge. That's right, just like my classmates had done so that time, I was simply one of the students who couldn't recite well enough and had to move appropriately.

'Is that really how it is?'

Suddenly, I heard someone's voice. No, I understood the true nature of that voice.

It was a voice most familiar to me, none other than my own voice.

It was the me who had one year ago severed my ties to the past without looking back.

'That time, did you really do all that you could have done?'

In front of me were classmates who trembled from confronting a chimera. Friends whose teeth chattered in fear.

There was a friend who had been wounded by the chimera. In front of the monster was a teacher who risked her life trying to help the student.

"I…… can't do any Recitation well enough yet."

I'm not able to use any Recitation that could oppose the chimera.

'Therefore, the natural thing to do is to run away?'

……Yes, exactly. That's me, a powerless Reciter.

'That's wrong.'

With an unchanging cold voice, my auditory hallucination piercingly responded. I couldn't chase that voice out of my head.

'Because, you are not a Reciter.'

Aren't I attending this Recitation school?

I want to become a Reciter, which is why I'm studying every day.

'You are simply attending a Recitation school, and simply pretending to learn about reciting.'

I'm not pretending. I…… I'm studying here every day, taking tests, and working hard together with my classmates. Isn't that plenty?

'Plenty? Your actions that day at that time, are you calling it plenty?'

……Enough already. Stop it already. That's already something done and over with.

I accepted it myself. ……Isn't that good enough?

'It isn't over. Because, you are lying to yourself. You are lying to you, your teachers, and even your friends in your class.'

……I-It isn't a lie.

I didn't intend for it to be like that—

'That's right. You probably aren't lying. But you aren't telling the truth either. You didn't tell them that you aren't actually a student intending to learn Recitations.'

That's enough. Stop it, stop it already. Please……

I'm, I'm—

'You are simply pretending to be a student at this Recitation school, Exorci(Gil)—'

"Stop iiiiiiiiiit!"

With a loud scream, the girl leaped out of bed.

Her body was flushed and refused to cool down, while her heartbeat pounded so loudly that her chest hurt. Gripping her chest, she gazed briefly at the light spilling in from beyond the curtains—

……It was a dream?

Finally, the girl realized that it was a hallucination.

"—Are you okay?"

At the sudden voice behind her, she turned around.

Beside her bed was another bed. Sitting up from the other bed was her companion, who she had become familiar with long ago.

It was a girl with black hair and a tall, slender body. They were classmates in the same school, and roommates in the student dormitories.

"Sorry, did I wake you up?"

From the hands of the clock, she saw that it was four o' clock in the morning. Too early.

"You were sweating a lot. Plus, it looked like you were having a nightmare."

Her friend pointed that out, but she was aware of all that even without being told. Sweat soaked her pajamas until they were nearly dripping wet, and her body felt so cold that she shivered. It was a bad kind of sweat.

"That dream again?"

"……Yeah."

It was a nightmare that had haunted her for a week already.

—No. It wasn't a dream, but surely a conflict within her.

"Will you be okay being alone starting the day after tomorrow?"

Her roommate was going away for a club training camp. During that time, would she still have bad dreams ? That was the problem.

Since she had had the same dream for a week already, she wasn't confident that it would stop the day after tomorrow. Surely it would keep repeating until her memory of that day faded and disappeared.

"I'll be fine. I'm not a child anymore."

She tried vainly to smile, but even she herself knew what a bad imitation it was.

"But hey, remember to go talk to someone during painful times. I don't mind."

"No, I'll be fine."

She pretended to be strong. She didn't want her friend to become too worried.

"Well, okay then."

Running her hand through her glossy, silky black hair, her friend turned around.

"I'm going to sleep for a bit longer. 'Night."

"……Okay."

Both her body and pajamas were cold and soaked with sweat. She took a towel out of the closet and wiped away the sweat.

As she was doing that, she felt someone gazing at her from behind and turned around.

"What's wrong?"

The girl who said was going to sleep was sitting on the bed and staring fixedly at her.

"Hey, here's a bit of advice from a friend."

"What is it?"

"—You're not suitable for making those fake smiles."

"……!"

Reflexively, her mouth opened in reply—

"Well, 'night."

But before she could speak, her roommate slipped back into bed.

After a few seconds, she could hear her friend's peaceful sleeping breaths.

"Fake smiles, huh?"

Sighing, she thought about her friend's words.

……Even I know something like that.

Introductory Play: Two People in the Dusk

Could it be called the fragrance of sunset? In the time just before the sun set, the gentle breeze that fluttered around carried a somehow nostalgic scent.

A fragrance that called forth sorrow.

—Was it flowers or spices? What could it be?

The scent of sunset. He had no intention of confirming what it actually was.

If he were to check, its charm would surely decrease by half. It was a scent shrouded in mystery, therefore it could bring forth these feelings.

“This is a really scary place, isn’t it?”

Sitting up straight on the old wooden chair, Xins Airwincle let out a faint breath.

He looked around him. There, encircled by a tall, dark grey fence, was an enormous garden.

Water gushed from a fountain dyed madder red as it basked in the setting sun, and the flowers blooming

profusely by his feet flourished proudly as midsummer gradually approached.

"When I'm here, I get the feeling that some ten years have passed and I've returned home."

He couldn't help but relax and forget about the passing of time.

"Hmm. Well, even for you, it's important to rest once in a while."

He smiled wryly at a voice that came from a place not too far in front of him.

Rest— I see, nicely put.

"How long will a broken bone take to heal?"

As he touched the bandage wrapped around his left arm, he tilted his head.

"It depends."

"……If it was caused by a hit from a chimera's claws?"

Instantly, a curtain of silence descended upon them.

Taking one breath seemed long, while two breaths meant there would be a short bit left over—

“In the first place, it’s because you can’t discipline yourself enough.”

Carried by the wind was his companion’s long breath that seemed like a sigh.

“It would be fine if you had only been bruised, but breaking your arm was just too clumsy. No matter how exceptional your Recitations are, there’s no point if your body itself isn’t healed. I’ve said that many times already .”

“……Senpai just isn’t disciplined enough.”

Without trying to hide his smile, Xins raised his head towards his companion.

Towards the owner of the garden and the enormous plot of land.

“You said that a lot. Especially when you were young. ”

His companion replied with an unchanged tone of voice. Of everyone Xins knew, there was no one else who had an outward appearance as unique as this man's.

—His exposed upper body had skin tanned brown by the sun.

His pants were a faded, deep brown color. That was all the clothing he wore. But in the place of clothes, the muscle fibres that thrust up from his skin seemed like a stronger armor than anything else.

Muscles ran from his back to his shoulder blades. Not a trace of fat could be seen on his abdomen, and his upper arms were nearly twice as thick as a normal person's. Although he had such an astonishing physique, the usual dim-wittedness that such giant men had couldn't be felt from him. According to those who saw him, they had been quite surprised by that fact.

He didn't have the sense of weight normally seen in people who specialized in muscular development.

After having devoted thousands of nights to disciplining himself, his body had been honed to its limits. Just like a swordsmith sharpening his blade,

under the process of “studying”, he had stripped away not only fat but excess muscle as well— His body was in a completely different dimension than a regular person’s.

After coming to understand the burden of his physique, bones, and internal organs, his meticulously calculated figure didn’t have even one gram of inconsistency.

Unattainable by even ancient artistic statues, his form was so perfect that even physiologists had nothing to complain about.

“Anyway, it’s Senpai’s turn.”

“Understood, I’ll move the <Queen> to 3-B.”

Even in the short time it took to say those words, he didn’t stop moving.

He gripped a metal spear with both hands.

He lifted and swung the weapon that shone dully.

Swing. Swing. Swing.

As it flowed, he turned it so that it didn't lose momentum. Turn vertically, turn horizontally, and then slash down.

It "cut" the wind, giving off a noise very different from the gentle breeze that blew through the garden.

It was a type of spearmanship completely suited to battle, created for a certain purpose. While it felt nimble like the fluttering of a bird's feathers, at the same time, it was also chilly as if it would pierce through everything.

The man's nimble and sharp movements made it feel beautiful.

I see. If it was him, receiving a blow from a chimera's claws would certainly not leave him in the same state as I am.

—Honestly, I'm no match for this person.

After gazing at the waltz for a short while, Xins turned his glance to the metal board resting on his knee. Following what the man had said, he moved the red enemy piece that was placed on the board.

After a brief moment of contemplation, he lifted his own piece.

"Then, I'll move my <Knight> to 12-E. I'm only two moves away from taking your <King>."

At that moment, the spear's movements didn't even falter.

"Hm……"

The sharp glint in the man's eyes weakened slightly.

"Then, my <King> will escape to 15-F……Well, that's what I thought."

As his short, light brown hair fluttered in the wind, he turned only his gaze toward Xins.

"One question. Could it be that your <Archer> is there ?"

"Yeah, I moved him there three turns ago. It's aimed directly at your <King>."

"Then, my <King> will escape to 14-D……Well, I wanted it to."

Once again, there was a moment of silence.

"One more question. Could it be that your <Jester> is hiding there?"

"Ah, it was found?"

After glancing at the board resting on his knee, Xins pretended to play dumb.

“Your <Knight> is blocking the front and your < Archer> is blocking the side column. You also put your < Jester> where I wanted the <King> to escape to. That’s your only attack strategy, isn’t it? It’s too obvious.”

He swung his spear without seeming to boast. But even so, it was amazing that he remembered. As expected of the “Senpai” who taught Xins the game.

But he had also revealed his next move. After thinking about that for a few seconds—

“But, I who got caught by this move shouldn’t speak to others like that. I admit defeat.”

He gradually lowered his voice.

“My daily practice is also just about over. That was good timing.”

Speaking those words, the long spear that he held also slowly stopped moving.

As he waited for his companion to wipe away the sweat, Xins stood up from the chair.

"I felt like today's Senpai didn't put his heart into it, did he?"

"……Hmph."

From the time his training started, until now.

Klaus Yung Gillshuvesher. The owner of this land finally turned to face Xins.

"Because I always end up losing, don't I? Senpai's moves today weren't good at all."

"Sorry. But I couldn't just not finish it."

He was totally aware of that. Without uttering a word, he simply nodded.

"—Were you thinking about it?"

To him, training with his spear was already something he could do without thinking about it. That was why he

could play such a board game while training. But today, it seemed that there was also something else on his mind.

"Sorta."

Without bothering to hide it, he let out a shaky sigh.

"Even though she's already this old, I worry about my daughter."

"That's right, she's already sixteen, isn't she?"

Contrary to his outward appearance, he cared deeply for his family. When he had spare time, Xins often had to listen as he bragged about his family.

……But, his daughter?

Until now, he had always talked about his wife. Xins didn't remember him saying much about his daughter. No, he seemed to almost try to avoid such a topic.

"That's right, I haven't told you much about my daughter."

As he wrapped his long spear in white cloth, he suddenly narrowed his eyes.

"By the way, what's your opinion about talent?"

Although Xins thought that his companion would talk about his daughter, he enquired about something different.

"Talent…… No matter what I say, it's hard to give an interesting answer right away."

"In the forty years I've lived like this, I've met many people who called themselves a 'genius'. After talking and eating with many of them, I've come to a realization. "

With a small sigh, he lifted his fist.

"That is, there are no geniuses in this world."

"Not even one out of all the people you met?"

Xins thought this question would hit the mark, but…

"No, not even one person."

Seeming unmoved by the question, he shook his head from side to side with an empty gaze.

"Most of the people I met, as I expected, were working hard behind the scenes. There were also others who didn't need to work hard to succeed, but…… Sure enough, they were simply insignificant humans with a lot of good luck."

After that, he shut his mouth.

"—Well, that's what I thought."

After that, he silently shrugged his shoulders.

"Although I had been confident in that, it turned out I was wrong. Two people, only two people in this world, no matter how much I tried to deceive myself, I had to admit that they were 'geniuses'."

He smoothly said those words and then looked over with a glint in his eyes.

"Two people who I know. One of them is you, Xins."

At that moment, Xins realized that he had been holding his breath.

As he listened, he had somehow sensed this.

Xins Airwincle— He became the first person in history to venture into an area that nobody else had, by mastering all five Recitation Colors and becoming the Rainbow Color Reciter.

"……I have mixed feelings about being praised for something like that."

"But it's the truth, you can't deny it."

"And the other person?"

If he were to give another name, it would undoubtedly be the person he had made a promise with, the Night-colored girl. The person who he had reunited with at a certain school, some ten years later. But there was no way that Klaus could know about her.

"Although she wasn't well-known in the world of Reciters, she was also someone worthy of making history ."

That was something Xins had naturally expected, so he didn't even nod.

"At first there was my family, the Yung, and then came other branch families. Within our several

thousands of people, there appeared a heaven-sent girl, unprecedented in history.”

Suddenly, Xins involuntarily frowned.

What did he say just now? —A girl?

“Yeah, that’s right.”

With an empty voice like it had turned into flakes of rusted iron, he continued.

That wasn’t something bad, but something he should have been bragging about.

But even so. Why had his gaze become clouded?

“However, that talent stopped before it could bloom into a large flower.”

With an anguished expression, he let his words weakly spill forth.

“How could such a thing happen? That child threw away the name Gillshuvesher that represented her natural talent, and chose the path of a Reciter.”

—The name Gillshuvesher?

'Even though she's already this old, I worry about my daughter.'

Xins finally recalled what he had muttered.

"Senpai, could that girl be…?"

"……My only daughter."

"Your only daughter abandoned the Exorcists (Gillshe) to be a Reciter?"

"The school she chose was Tremia Academy."

Tremia.

Xins could only think of one school with that name. No way.

"Yeah. The school you were at when that spontaneous catalyst discharge incident occurred. You might even have met her."

"What is your daughter's name?"

Gazing briefly at the madder red sun, the father quietly closed his eyes.

"—Ada. A girl who became a high school student this year at the Recitation School."

1st Play – Wanting to Become a Copper-Colored Song User

Part 1

Perhaps it was a special case due to being at the edge of the continent, but it was a high school which thousands of students who specialized in Recitation attended— Tremia Academy. The campus was several times larger than other Recitation schools, while the quality of both the facilities and the teaching staff couldn't be described as inferior to other prestigious schools.

Located in the center of the campus was a building in the shape of a dome-shaped arch.

'Books Administration Building' —Holding around one million two hundred thousand books, it was an establishment that stretched from five floors above ground to two floors underground. It wasn't just a place for studying, but was also used for socializing and taking a break. Not just students, but teachers also frequently visited that building, qualifying it to be called a multipurpose hall.

On the second floor. A young student wearing a white uniform gazed fixedly at the bookshelves, which were lined up in rows. He was at most twelve or thirteen years old. It was a boy with deep purple hair and androgynous features.

“Umm. This and……this.”

With both hands full of resource books, the boy excitedly descended to the lobby downstairs.

“Neight-kun, are you okay? You’re staggering.”

Seeing his figure, a girl wearing a school uniform called out.

Mio Lentear. With blond hair and a young-looking face, she calmly called out. Although she was actually sixteen years old, she looked two to three years younger.

“I’m fine…… Probably.”

Peering up from the books he held, the boy— Neight Yehlemihas nodded slightly at the girl.

"It looks hot outside, are you just resting for a while in the library?"

Closing the book that she was reading, Mio asked with an uneasy look. Books Administration Building was the school's official name for it. But neither students nor teachers used such a long name. Instead, it was commonly called the 'library'.

"It's because I can't practice Recitations anywhere other than outdoors. Also, Kluele is waiting for me outside."

Recitations. That was the technique that the students of this school specifically studied. To picture their desired target in their heart, then while holding a catalyst of the same color, to praise the name of the target— It was a type of summoning technique.

It was classified into five colors 'Keinez(Red)', 'Ruguz(Blue)', 'Surisuz(Yellow)', 'Beorc(Green)', and 'Arzus(White)', and students could each choose a color to specialize in, in order to call out an object with the same color as their specialty.

"What about Mio-san? Kluele-san is waiting for us out on the campus."

Looking at her, Neight saw that her gaze had already turned from him to the books in his arms. By the way, Mio's specialty was in Green Recitations. In her case, whenever she wanted to call out a green frog, she would prepare green catalysts such as green drawing paper and then sing a song of praise.

"Hang on a moment. I'm almost done reading this book. Ehh, why am I suddenly interested in the mystery genre…"

……He felt like he had been continuously hearing her say those words ever since three days ago.

After summer vacation had started, ever since she had suddenly started picking up mystery novels, Mio acted like this. Judging from her personality, she probably wouldn't leave the library until she had read all of the mystery novels there.

"Then, I'll go ahead and start practicing out on the campus."

He could barely see in front of him with all the books he carried, but it couldn't be helped. Crossing through the library exit, he continued down the corridor leading to the entranceway—

"……!"

With an impact like crashing into a wall, Neight and the books he held all tumbled to the floor.

"Hey. Are you okay?"

Looking up, it was a thin teacher with glasses. The teacher wore the standard white coat with a school badge woven in blue thread over his chest. Umm, was he one of the teachers in charge of the higher grades?

"Ah, y-yes, I'm fine. Um……I'm sorry."

"You should look ahead when you're walking— Well, that's what I would usually say."

Looking around at the mountain of books scattered on the floor, the teacher's expression softened.

"After seeing how hard you're studying, I won't scold you today."

Picking up a book, the teacher gazed at the front cover.

"How nostalgic. I've read this resource book many times before. Well, that's a story of back when I was a student."

He picked up a stack of books and handed them back to Neight. In fact, they were in the same order as Neight had originally arranged them in. When they bumped into each other, had the teacher remembered the order of the books?

"T……Thank you very much."

"Although it's summer vacation, don't forget to walk quietly down the hallways."

Teasingly, the teacher pushed up the bridge of his glasses.

With his night-colored hair fluttering, the small boy quickly headed down the passageway.

"……Speaking of which, that boy."

Gazing at the boy's back, Mirror narrowed his eyes.

Was he called Neight? Soon after he had entered the academy, because of his unique situation, he had become a popular topic among teachers. Recitations consisted of five colors, and each student in the school had picked a color to specialize in. However, only that boy was learning a completely different color.

Night-Color Recitations— It was a controversial color whose existence was still not officially accepted.

"It's too bad, I wanted to talk with him a bit longer."

Even teachers such as himself didn't know much about that Recitation. Naturally, he was interested in it, but there was also another topic he wanted to talk about.

What connected him and that boy, in other words, a single woman. After she had graduated from Elfand, what path had she travelled? He was considerably interested in the girl who had once been his classmate.

"Unfortunately, it's not something I should talk about during work."

Glancing at the documents tucked under his arm, he took a deep breath.

"Now then, time for me to start the investigation."

***

"……Neight."

Carrying a flask filled with a catalyst in one hand, Neight turned around to face the voice coming from behind him.

"Y-Yes, what is it?"

"We should take a little break. You seem to be unsteady on your feet."

The girl's voice was calm and soft. That voice came from beneath the shade of a tree a few meters away from where he stood on the campus. In a small shadow that blocked the intense rays of midsummer sunlight— As she said that, the girl's long, scarlet hair fluttered in the gentle breeze.

"B-But…"

"Don't deny it. Ever since a while ago, your Recitations were continuously failing, weren't they? Your concentration is decreasing."

What she said was true. Without objecting, Neight reluctantly nodded.

"……Okay."

"Here, put this on."

She forcefully pressed a large-brimmed straw hat onto his head. Its size was slightly too big, and his whole field of vision was covered by the brim of the hat.

"……Um, I can't see in front of me."

Lifting up the hat, his field of vision enlarged.

But filling his whole field of view at close range—

"That's fine. You seem to be the type of person who would keep running until you run out of energy and collapse."

Before his eyes, a girl wearing a deep blue one-piece dress stood up. She was tall with long scarlet hair, whose appearance stood out even from a long distance away.

Kluele Sophi Net. She was sixteen, three years older than Neight. Like her hair color indicated, she specialized in Red Recitations. Ever since he had enrolled in this school, she had always been there by his side.

“But what’s troublesome is, that’s also one of your good qualities.”

Half-teasingly, the girl smiled and let out a small laugh .

“……Somehow, I don’t feel like that’s a compliment.”

Fufu— Sure enough, she cheerfully covered her mouth with her hand.

“Anyway, come rest for a while in the shade.”

Pressing down with one hand on her one-piece dress that fluttered in the wind, she turned and walked away.

“U-Um, Kluele-san?”

"The café nearby should be open. I'll go buy some cold drinks, so wait here."

Part 2

The wind blowing through the campus stirred up sand from the ground.

"……It's really hot!"

Taking shelter in the shadow of a school building, Neight wiped the sweat from his forehead. He should have worn some light clothes like Kluele, but he had reflexively worn his usual white school uniform. He could return to his dorm and change, but that was just as troublesome.

"……Kluele-san still hasn't returned yet."

It took around ten minutes round trip to go to the café in the first year school building. But because it would be crowded today, it should take a bit longer.

"Oh, if it isn't Neighty. What's wrong?"

—Should he have found a place to read a book today, just like Mio?

"……H-Huh? Neighty, didn't you hear me?"

Sure enough, he should have stayed in the library. Mio-san was also there.

"H-Hey, over here, Neighty. Don't ignore me…… Aah , fine, Neight!"

Neight?

When he suddenly heard his name being called out from behind him, he reflexively turned around. In front of him was a tall, familiar girl with black hair.

"……Eh, Serges-san?"

Like Mio and Kluele, she was a girl from his class. She wasn't wearing the designated school uniform, but indigo sportswear. On her back was a bulky backpack.

"Good morning, Serges-san."

"'Morning. But you should've noticed me from the very beginning. I was calling out to Neighty since a while ago."

"By Neighty, do you mean me?"

Although he had thought the name was similar, Neight didn't expect it to be directed at himself.

"Because, you see, although we aren't the same age, we're still classmates. It doesn't feel right to use 'kun' and call you 'Neight-kun'. So you need a nickname. Well ? Isn't it great? Isn't the name I thought of just now great ?"

"No matter how you put it…"

Recoiling back like he had been pushed, Neight slowly pointed to the backpack she wore.

"……Um, Serges-san, why are you still at school even though it's summer vacation? And why are you wearing such a large backpack?"

"Don't change the topic so casually. ……Well, I guess it's alright."

Murmuring quietly, the girl lowered the backpack she shouldered. As she set it down on the ground, there was a heavy thumping noise, along with a cloud of dust.

"What's inside that?"

At that moment.

"Hm, this? You want to know? You want to hear about it, don't you? Don't regret it, okay?"

With a suspicious twinkle in her eyes, smiling, Serges drew closer.

"Ah…… A-Actually, it's fine. It somehow seems scary, so…"

"No no, it's nothing major. It's just someone's fresh corpse, someone young just like Neighty—"

"Uwaa, someone come and help meeee!"

"Hey, wait! Hey Neighty, don't run away! I was joking !"

Just before Neight started running as fast as he could, Serges gripped his neck from behind. Fearfully, Neight turned around to face the girl.

"……Just what is really in there?"

"A tent, a sleeping bag, food, rain gear, and various other things. Because I'm in the mountain climbing club."

The mountain climbing club. Speaking of which, Neight felt that there truly was such a club. Sure enough, the shoes she was wearing weren't ordinary sports shoes, but something thicker.

"Starting tomorrow, we're going on a trip for five days and four nights to try mountain climbing during the summer, so today is the club's last meeting. Say, what's Neighty doing?"

Staring intently, she sized up Neight's school uniform.

"Umm, I'm practicing Recitations with Kluele-san and Mio-san."

"Ah, I passed by Kluele a while ago. Where's Mio?"

"She's reading mystery novels in the library. This summer, she wants to finish reading all of the five hundred seventy books in the library."

"Isn't that not related to Recitations at all?"

Her words sounded like that of a natural comeback.

"Her enthusiasm is amazing. These last few days, she seems to be coming to the library at seven in the morning just to wait for it to open. She was even bragging about how she's the earliest student to arrive."

"……Hmm."

Slowly, the color of Serges's eyes dimmed.

Like she was thinking of something, she seemed to gaze into space.

"If I remember correctly, Neighty is living in the school dormitories?"

"Yeah. There happened to be a vacancy, so I was put there."

Tremia Academy's dormitories were located within the school campus. Because it was only about a ten minute walk from there to the first year school building, the dorms were popular among students. Because there was much competition, unless your home was especially far from the school, it was hard to get accepted in.

"Well then. Tomorrow, wake up early and get to school by six-thirty."

At hearing her smooth words, Neight doubted his ears .

"……Six-thirty?"

"That's right. Well, it's six-thirty to arrive at the ' rooftop of the first year school building'."

Of all places, the roof of the school building? Impossible. Although the school gates might be open at six-thirty, the school building itself should be locked at that time.

"Use the emergency staircase. That way, you can get on the roof without entering the building."

The emergency staircase was normally a prohibited area for students. But why were they now doing such a thing?

"Is someone there?"

"You'll find out if you go. Well then, it's about time for me to go to my meeting."

Glancing at the large clock on the wall of the school building, Serges picked up her backpack.

“Well then, you two. The interferer will be going now, so enjoy yourselves.”

You two? Before Neight could guess at the meaning…

“……What an unsettling way of talking.”

Neight heard a familiar voice coming from somewhere behind him. Turning around, there stood Kluele with a cup in each hand. Standing opposite to Kluele who was raising an eyebrow, the girl shouldering a backpack waved her hand cheerfully.

“No no, there wasn’t any deep meaning behind that. Also, Kluele, make sure your left shoulder heals quickly! ”

With the sleeve of her one-piece dress fluttering in the wind, Kluele’s shoulder was slightly exposed to the sunlight. The white bandage seemed pitiful against her slightly flushed skin. It was a wound she had gotten two weeks ago, during the incident that happened on campus . According to her, it could be called healed already.

"……Got it."

"You……You seem mature, but you act rash when doing something unexpected."

With a disappointed face, Kluele pouted. Seeing that, the black-haired girl's amused expression softened.

"But, that's also what makes you cute."

"Wha……What's that supposed to mean?"

Kluele didn't expect those words to be used back on her and stepped back embarrassedly.

"Well then, bye bye, you two."

With a mischievous smile, Serges left, heading in the direction of the school building.

Watching after her until her figure had disappeared from sight on the campus—

"Oh, speaking of which, I wonder what Serges is doing carrying such a large backpack."

Having forgotten to mention it, the question floated into Kluele's mind.

"A club activity. It seemed to be a mountain climbing camp."

"I see. If she's going somewhere far, I should've asked for a souvenir. But I wonder what kind of souvenirs there are from a mountain."

"……The fresh corpse of a victim. Moreover, someone who's around our age."

"Eh?"

"……It's nothing."

The image of such a thing being in the backpack arose from his imagination. ……Ugh, that probably wouldn't leave his mind for a while.

"Ah, that's right. Kluele-san. Tomorrow, I want to come to school slightly earlier."

"Sure. But I'll still be coming at the same time as always. Although, what's up all of a sudden?"

How should he explain? He contemplated for a few seconds.

“Just checking whether or not someone will be on the roof.”

Neight answered by saying what Serges had said to him.

“Who do you mean by ‘someone’?”

“Well……She didn’t tell me.”

Unsure of what expression he should make, Neight bit his cheek.

I wasn’t told— Another way to put it would be that she didn’t tell me just now, but I’ll find out if I go to the rooftop. That was what her words implied.

……In other words, someone I know?

Part 3

From the main entrance, Neight looked up at the large clock hanging on the side of the school building. The needles of that clock pointed at a time half an hour earlier than what he had promised Serges yesterday.

—It was six o'clock.

Just who could be on the roof of the first year school building this early in the morning?

He was so interested that he couldn't even sleep well last night. Because of that, although he had come early, his eyelids couldn't help but feel heavy.

Biting back a yawn, Neight walked through the main entrance.

Not only students, but looking around, there weren't even any teachers in sight. He headed towards the dome-shaped Books Administration Building beside the first year school building. As expected, the library wasn't open yet, and he couldn't see the figures of students lining up either. Of course, neither was the figure of the girl he was used to seeing visible.

"It's this early, after all. It's natural that Mio-san wouldn't be here."

Talking to himself, Neight turned back to the first year school building.

That building was dark grey with a strong metal structure. During the incident at the recital contest, this building had been able to withstand the chimeras' attacks.

"……As expected, it's closed."

A large padlock hung on the entrance of the school building. Glancing at it, Neight turned and headed to the back of the building.

Towering up from a grassy field where sunlight didn't reach was a spiraling emergency staircase.

"It would be much easier if I could fly up like Arma."

Looking up at the long spiral reaching up to the roof, Neight let out a small sigh.

Clomp, clomp…

On the slightly rusted staircase, the sound of a single person's footsteps echoed.

Walking past the second floor, past the third floor, he reached the roof of the school building.

—Is someone really here, at such a place?

It wasn't that he was calling Serges's words a lie. It was just that he didn't understand why a student would be up here, instead of on the campus or in a classroom.

He went up the last step leading to the roof.

As the morning sun suddenly burned his eyelids, he closed his eyes. But he didn't close them completely because a sharp sound like something cutting the wind resounded in his eardrums.

What was that sound?

In the direction of the sound— He turned his gaze to the center of the vast rooftop.

"……Eh."

In the dazzling sunlight, Neight opened both of his eyes.

Dancing beneath the vivid sun was a girl with wheat-brown skin.

—No, not dancing……

The girl was holding a large pole. A dull metallic luster shone from the tip. It was a blade that had clearly been sharpened— In other words, it was a spear.

The girl wielded a spear longer than her own height.

Swinging like it was flowing, spinning like it was dancing, and piercing like it was fluttering. Moving without stopping for even a second, each movement seemed different from the next. The polished blade flowed like it was drawing the onlookers in. Was this really training with a spear? Seeing her beautiful actions, he couldn't help but think that.

"……Amazing."

At first glance, the performance seemed like a beautiful war dance. However, she seemed to have a vigor that couldn't be emitted when acting. It couldn't be described with just the word 'reality'. That was what the expression on the spear-wielder's face said.

The girl's movements didn't stop. On the roof so wide that you could run a race, her feet moved so fast that his eyes couldn't keep up. Even the splash of sweat glittering in the sunlight was beautiful. Different from any sport, it couldn't be classified as something in this dimension.

Returning from the edge of the rooftop to the center, the girl spun the spear with one hand.

……Kiiiiin.

"—Ah!"

As a metallic sound rang out, Neight finally returned to his senses.

Ten meters away, the girl stopped moving. The spear wasn't in her hand.

—The spear, did she drop it?

Her actions confirmed his thoughts. Looking down at the spear fallen on the ground, the girl let out a small sigh.

He hadn't noticed because he had been captivated by her movements until now, but the girl actually wasn't very tall. She was at most only a few centimeters taller than him. She wore white shorts and a tank top of the same color. Her bare shoulder that was exposed to the sun was a tanned brown color. No, it would be more appropriate to call it copper-brown.

Her light brown hair was cut to shoulder-length, a boyish girl with short hair. Her face was small in proportion to her body, but she had contrasting large eyes. Her impressive features somehow reminded him of a cat—

……Eh? This person looks familiar.

“Hm? Hey, you.”

The girl before him finally raised her face. Their eyes met.

“Hey, if it isn’t Chibi-kun. ‘Morning! You’re here early, aren’t you?”

Her breathtaking expression from before was like a lie. With an indifferent expression, she raised one hand.

“……Ada-san?”

Ada Yung— The girl before his eyes was someone in the same class as him and Kluele. It was the familiar face of a classmate.

“Ada-san, is that a spear?”

“Mm, aah. Wait a moment, okay? I can’t stay sweaty like this.”

From a bag lying near the edge of the roof, the girl took out a towel.

Ada-san, just how long have you been here?

It was still earlier than seven in the morning. Even though it was only this time, from the smiling girl's forehead, no, from her whole body, large drops of sweat flowed.

"Hey, Chibi-kun. I have a favor to ask."

……Chibi-kun?

"H-Hey. Even Neighty is slightly better…"

"Eeh. But doesn't the nickname Chibi-kun sound cute? It has more charm to it!"

"Really?"

Even as he indirectly expressed his dissatisfaction, the girl had an indifferent expression. It seemed that to her, that nickname was already fixed.

"Yeah, yeah. By the way, Chibi-kun, can you face the other way for a bit?"

"The other way?"

For what purpose? Not understanding her intention, he stared blankly at Ada.

The girl curled her lips into a grin.

“Sure enough, Chibi-kun is Chibi-kun.”

“Eh?”

“I need to change, change clothes. I want to take off my tank top. If Chibi-kun doesn’t turn around, won’t it be too provoking?”

“……If that’s what you meant, then say it earlier.”

Puffing up his cheeks, Neight turned away. Really, if she had said earlier that she wanted to change, then he would have turned around right away.

“That’s why you’re Chibi-kun.”

Teasing him, the girl’s shoulders shook cheerfully.

“Club activity?”

What the girl was telling him was something that he had heard about before.

“Yeah. I’m in a spear-wielding club. I was practicing just now.”

“Practicing, at this early in the morning?”

He wasn’t sure about the exact time. If he had to guess, she had probably come here before six. He had no idea how early she woke up each morning.

“Club practice starts at ten. Before that is time for private lessons.”

“By private lessons, you mean individual practice?”

And then. As if hiding her embarrassment, the girl shyly turned away and placed her hand on the back of her head.

“Well, it’s different for everyone. For me, it’s…… Well, my memory isn’t very good. I don’t understand much or get good-quality practice, so I have to work even harder.”

Memory isn't very good?

"Eh, but Ada-san. You joined the spear-wielding club this April, right? It hasn't even been half a year, yet you're already this good. How could your memory be bad?"

Suddenly, the girl's facial expression changed.

The change was so subtle that it couldn't be expressed in words. But something scary seemed to light up the girl's eyes. Frightening. Or more accurately, it somehow stirred up fear inside him.

"No, no. Chibi-kun saw it too, right? In the very end, I ended up dropping my spear. That wasn't cool at all. I'm still making such basic mistakes after so many years—"

……So many years? That means...

Before he had time to comprehend the meaning of her words, the girl hurriedly waved her hand.

"Ah. Forget it, forget what I just said! It's a girl's secret."

"……H-Huh?"

Although he didn't understand, pressured by the girl's vigor, he couldn't help but nod.

—But it really was amazing.

Wearing sportswear, she looked fairly short. Just judging by her appearance, it was hard to believe that someone as slender as her could wield a spear.

"Well, it's hard work just to keep this body figure."

Poking her arms a few times, Ada crossed her arms with a bitter smile.

"After wielding such a heavy thing, my muscles start developing pretty quickly. That's fine for a boy, but not so much for a girl. ……I've already given up on my tan though."

"It must be difficult, isn't it?"

For him, it was hard to even develop muscles.

—Neight, you should train your body a bit more. Kluele had once said that to him, but he didn't know exactly how to train.

"See, men don't understand these feelings that girls have. Even though I restrict how much I eat just to keep this body figure, they say things like 'If you don't eat more, you won't keep that figure!' And when I'm doing makeup, they barge in and say things like 'You're so slow.'"

Crossing her arms, Ada shrugged sullenly.

"……Ah. I-Is that so?"

At first, Neight thought she had been talking about her boyfriend.

"First of all, that stubborn father of mine doesn't even understand his daughter's feelings."

But as he continued listening to her, that didn't seem to be the case.

"By 'men', did Ada-san mean her father?"

"Yeah."

Surprisingly, she easily admitted that.

"My father is, how do I put it… a blockhead who doesn't pay detailed attention to others. Also, he lacks creativity, and even gave his only daughter a ten kilogram iron dumbbell for her fourteenth birthday."

"That's…… Rather than creative, I think it's an original idea."

No way! Instead of using words, Ada furiously shook her head.

"It was ten kilos, ten kilos! I got mad and threw it at him. And then that idiot father said, 'Sorry, would fifteen kilos have been better?' He asked me with such a serious face!"

"……You threw it? Even though it was ten kilograms? "

It would have been bad for the person being thrown at , but since Ada-san was angry, it couldn't be helped—

"In the first place, my usual dumbbell is twenty kilos!"

"Was that why you were angry?!"

"Hm? What's wrong, Chibi-kun? You don't seem very energetic?"

……Take back what I said before. Angry people should just be angry.

"Ada-san, do people often say that you're similar to your father?"

"Eh, there's no way anyone would say that. We're not similar, not similar at all!"

She frowned openly as if she really hated that statement.

"Ah, that's right. I should go soon."

Suddenly, as if she had just thought of something, she quickly stood up.

"Is it time for your club?"

"Nope. I'm going shopping today. It's the long-awaited trip, so I need to go buy things like a bag and some summer clothes."

"Trip? Are you going somewhere?"

"Isn't Chibi-kun also going?"

Carefully wrapping her spear in a piece of cloth, Ada tilted her head.

"After the incident a while back, parts of the school buildings are being repaired, right? The supplementary lessons during summer vacation are usually held in Tremia Academy, but this year we're going to Tremia Academy's branch school. It's a place beside the ocean."

As she said that, Neight realized he had seen a notice about that before.

"Chibi-kun's also going, right? Kluele said she would also go. Aren't you tired of only practicing Recitations? Occasionally, you also need time to relax."

"……Kluele-san told me the same thing."

"That's right. Then let's go shopping together with everyone! Anyway, Mio should be at the library, right? And Kluele also seems like she has some free time."

As soon as she finished speaking, the girl quickly ran down the emergency staircase.

"W-Wait, Ada-san. Don't you have club activities today?"

"It's fine, it's fine. I'll just say I had a stomachache today."

I-Is that really okay?

But speaking of which, didn't she also act like this during class?

"……Ada-san is a strange person."

"Eh, did you say something?"

She stopped running down the stairs and with sharp ears, asked in return.

"No, it's nothing!"

Telling an obvious lie, Neight also headed down the emergency stairs.

Part 4

"Hey Enne, aren't you hot?"

Like he had suddenly thought of it, her companion asked.

"I'm hot, but I'm a teacher so I have to wear the appropriate clothing."

Resisting the urge to nod her head, Enne replied with the answer she had prepared beforehand. She was wearing a suit with white as the main color. Even though the white cloth reflected the sunlight, it didn't change how hot she felt.

"Besides, isn't Mirror also wearing a teacher's lecture clothing?"

"Ah, that white coat that looks like a scholar's, right? He likes wearing that though."

Her colleague who said that wore a flamboyant polka-dotted T-shirt. But even so, he seemed hot, and currently had the edges of his T-shirt tucked in.

"……Zessel, you should wear some neater clothing!"

He was a male teacher who was Enne's colleague as well as her childhood friend. Regardless of whether he was at school or not, he had probably heard those words hundreds of times to him by now.

"The headmaster said we can do as we like. I do dress neat in front of students, but it's summer vacation. Plus, there's no way any student could be here at this time—"

"There is. There's a child waiting for the library to open. Although if I recall correctly, she's probably a first-year student."

"……Is that so?"

"Which means starting tomorrow, you're also wearing a suit."

……Give me a break.

He hastily swallowed back the words that he almost absent-mindedly said.

Tremia Academy, Building of General Affairs. The most innermost room on the first floor— They had arrived near that place.

Beside her colleague who straightened his posture, Enne discreetly adjusted the collar of her suit.

“So you do care, don’t you?”

“If I said I didn’t, would you believe me?”

After hearing her childhood friend’s teasing tone of voice, she sent him a meaningful look.

“We were chosen to come at such an early time just so students wouldn’t find out about it and involuntarily reveal it to other teachers. No matter what this is about, make sure you’re ready to face it.”

Towering in front of them was a large, wooden door engraved with impressive patterns.

“I’m not good at dealing with this sort of thing.”

Enne took a step back, meaning ‘I leave this to you’.

Slowly, she pushed the back of Zessel, who stood in front of her.

“……I’m not good at it either.”

"Come on, go for it. I'll treat you to lunch."

"……Seriously, give me a break."

Sighing a second time, Zessel knocked on the door of the headmaster's room. He entered the room in which the dark green hallway changed into a soft, deep crimson carpet that was spread out on the floor.

The headmaster's room. Inside, several teachers were already standing in a circle.

"Sorry, you two, for calling you here so early in the morning."

In the center of the circle, an old man wearing light clothing raised his hand slightly.

"You can join the circle for now. Everyone is probably busy, so I'll just quickly tell you what's going on."

—What's going on?

Leaning back against the nearest wall, Enne looked at the faces around her.

There was the headmaster and his close advisor Jessica , the director of education. Beside them were the teachers in charge of first-year students. Teachers who taught the other grades included herself, Zessel, and Mirror.

"This summer as well, in order for first-year students to learn some basics, they are going to summertime supplementary lessons. ……But, the incident that occurred a few days ago is probably still fresh in their minds."

The recital contest— The teachers' expressions instantly turned serious. Although they had avoided the worst result, a considerable number of students and teachers had been injured in that incident.

……That wasn't something they wanted to remember.

"In order for us to repair the school, the usual supplementary lessons which students stay overnight at this school for have been cancelled. Instead, we will use the school buildings of Tremia Academy's branch school in Fidellia. It will be a special field trip."

Being the only person whose expression didn't change, the headmaster standing in the center continued speaking.

Branch school. Rather than calling it a school, it was a facility opened to serve as a local gathering hall. Enne hadn't visited it before herself. If she recalled correctly, Fidellia was a place near the ocean.

"The problem is the <Egg>."

The old man's voice wavered slightly. It was a voice mixed with seriousness and distress.

"The fact that nobody passed away in the incident is a blessing among the misfortune, but some students and teachers in this school received injuries. Obviously, the school buildings were damaged as well. ……At that time , many events happened to occur simultaneously. However, the main cause of everything was the atrocious catalyst I brought into the school."

Spitting those words out like poison, he turned his gaze to a map hanging on the wall.

On the north side of the continent, located on a mountain range that ran through the continent was a red dot. That was Tremia Academy.

On the edge of the continent some distance away, on land that faced the blue-painted ocean, was another red dot. Was that the branch school?

“That is the Kelberk Research Institute where the bothersome catalyst was refined. However, they have branch facilities in various places on the continent. It seems that it wasn’t the main research facility, but a branch facility that originally refined the <Egg>. Actually , the one who brought that catalyst to this school was also a staff member from the branch facility.”

The name ‘Kelberk Research Institute’ sounded familiar to Enne. With its base set up in the center of the continent, it was a large-scale research institute that employed worthy researchers. The school had invited lecturers from there many times.

“Not long ago, I received a message from the research institute’s headquarters, but they told me to discuss the details with staff members from the branch facility.”

……I see. She somewhat understood. Looking up, she exchanged glances with Mirror, who stood in front of her . She and Mirror both nodded slightly.

“I understand the situation. So you’re saying that while the first-year students go on their summer camp, we should go complain to the head of the branch facility, right?”

“……Zessel.”

Instead of sighing, Enne closed her eyes. If this wasn’t the headmaster’s office, she would have pinched the back of that idiot standing beside her.

“Eh? Ah, I was joking, of course.”

Her childhood friend smiled deceptively with a carefree expression. ……Why hadn’t this guy fixed his childish habits?

“Well, it’s not that I don’t understand what Zessel is trying to say. But what I’m concerned about this time is another matter.”

Was that a good thing? It seemed that the headmaster wasn’t worried about what Zessel had mentioned.

"The research facility that refined the <Egg> is located in Fidellia, where the first-year students are headed."

……Could this timing be called good or bad?

Then again, Kelberk Research Institute is a facility cooperating with Tremia Academy. It could certainly happen that our branch school is located next to that facility.

"By the way, we received a message from the main facility the day before yesterday."

Miller, who stood next to the wall across from Enne, continued speaking, explaining the headmaster's words.

"Recently, our communication with the Fidellia branch seems to have stopped. Furthermore, this happened a few days after it had been confirmed that the <Egg> had gone out of control in this school. We have been trying to contact them since then, but haven't received a reply."

"Was the time we lost contact with them also when the recital contest was happening? Has the investigation into the cause of this made any progress?"

The headmaster answered the frowning Zessel with a shake of his head.

"That is something I want you guys to investigate. Mirror has already begun looking into this."

I see. From the time she had entered the room, she had been curious about the contents of the documents that Mirror had tucked under his arm.

"Although using that sort of place as the location of the first-year students' training camp isn't something to be proud of…… Even we have only recently learned of the situation about the Kelberk Research Institute branch facility. It would be slightly difficult to change the chosen location in only these few days. Well, our branch school and the research institute aren't directly beside each other. Teachers in charge of first-year students, please make sure that students don't leave the branch school's campus."

The teachers in charge of the first-year students must watch over them carefully.

That means at the same time, me and Zessel's duty is — to accompany the camp disguised as teachers in charge of lectures, and investigate the situation of the research institute.

"……It's a significant task, isn't it?"

"That just means I have a lot of confidence in you guys."

The one who responded wasn't the headmaster.

Jessica, director of education— the teacher who she, Zessel, and Mirror looked up to.

"Well then, everyone can continue on with their own duties. You should all know already, but this matter must not be revealed to the students!"

2nd Play – Merely Because I Desired This Moment

Part 1

With a high-pitched call of its steam whistle, the black train arrived at the platform.

It continuously spat out high-temperature, high-pressure water vapor into the air. He hadn't heard about the theory in detail, but it seemed that the steam was used to move pistons, which sent power to the wheels.

"……Wow."

Looking up, Neight involuntarily let out a shout of joy and amazement.

"It's amazing!"

The metal vehicle consisted of nearly ten compartments, which together made up one train. He couldn't imagine how heavy they were, and couldn't believe that such large masses of metal could move like this.

"Neight, is this your first time riding a steam train?"

Someone tapped Neight's shoulder. Looking up, beside him stood a male student with a well-built physique.

"It's my first time seeing a train. When I moved here, I came by boat. What about you, Ouma-san?"

Instead of replying, with an attendance book in hand, the class representative in charge of overseeing the male students shrugged nonchalantly.

"I rode a train often when returning to my home in the countryside. I could take it easy during those times but… … as expected, not right now."

All approximately four hundred of Tremia Academy's first-year students had gathered at one platform. Because of that, the platform had become crowded. There was no way of knowing who was where. Although each class should have made plans to assemble together, at this point there were only ten male students gathered around Ouma.

"How should I put it, because it's so hard to gather together, everyone's actually feeling cheerful."

While flipping through the class attendance list, the boy looked around with a surprised expression. Although the teachers seemed to also be guiding students around, even the figures of the teachers were hidden in the wave of people.

"It must be difficult being a class representative."

"I have it fairly easy. Because if I see one of the boys in our class and call out to him, he'll come over quickly."

Is that so? Neight tilted his head at Ouma's manner of speaking.

"……So then, are there times when that isn't the case?"

"Look, that person's having it rather difficult."

He was gazing at— Carrying a handbag, a tall girl with scarlet hair was pushing through the crowd and running around the platform with an exhausted expression.

A girl wearing a Tremia uniform had left the platform and was running unsteadily toward the shops in the station. She was grabbed by the neck.

"Hey Mio, where do you think you're going!"

"Hm? Um, I was wondering if we should go buy some souvenirs. They're products that are only available in this part of the world."

Her classmate answered with an easygoing voice, not showing how agitated she was. The mystery novel that she was in the middle of reading was tucked under her arm.

"We're not even about to leave yet. You're too rushed! "

As soon as the girl had taken Mio back to the platform, the next person she set her eye on was—

"……Hey, wait, Serges! Why do you have such a large backpack on? That's too big to bring onto the train!"

"This is— Kluele, listen! I need to have my own blankets and pillow with me. Also, as someone from the mountain climbing club, I can't bring just a sleeping bag while travelling. I also need a tent, emergency rations, rain gear, a portable cooking stove, and— Ah, if it isn't Neighty. Want to sleep with me in my sleeping bag tonight? It's really warm!"

"I'm confiscating all of it! No suspicious invitations either! —Hm? Hey, Kyrie! No eating allowed in the train station! Didn't I say before that you can't eat candy on the platform?!"

"But Kluele. It's a deluxe, limited edition cookie that I went to so much trouble to buy. And as a member of the cuisine research society……"

The mature-looking girl lightly shook her wavy hair. Although Neight hadn't spoken to her very much before, Kyrie was also one of his classmates.

"You're trusting the advertisements too much! That kind of thing is sold anywhere! ……Aah really, everyone please stay still! No, I mean, stop your futile resistance and get caught obediently!"

The girls of the class ran away wherever they pleased. Catching them and dragging them to the gathering place one after the other was the other class representative.

Neight stared idly at the situation.

"……Poor Kluele-san."

"No matter how you put it, the girls in our class are troublesome to deal with."

Before Neight realized it, all of the male students had lined up behind Ouma, who was smiling bitterly.

Part 2

……What should he do?

The enemy's defense was as solid as a rock.

He had no chance to surround the enemy, and a thick, protective wall was also spread out to prevent a concentrated attack on one spot. The tunnel that he should have left was filled with enemy pieces, and the soldiers protecting the <King> had already been scattered.

—Should he make a final, suicidal attack? No, he shouldn't get desperate.

"Neight-kun, have you decided?"

"……P-Please let me think for a bit longer, just thirty more seconds."

Without looking away from the game board by his hand, he shook his head in Mio's direction.

Of course, his first priority was the <King>'s survival. Which meant the <King> must first escape to 15-F. However, his opponent's archer was already on 12-F, cornering him. In that case, another plan was to move the <King> to 14-D. However, sure enough, an enemy piece was blocking him there as well. Standing there by itself was an ordinary <Pawn>. Since it was his turn right now, he could capture it with his <King>.

—His only fear was that……it was a <Jester> in the disguise of a <Pawn>.

This position seemed like it wanted him to eat that piece. It was very suspicious.

"……No way."

"Huh? Neight-kun, what's wrong?"

A question mark seemed to float over Mio's head. However, on her face was a broad grin.

……But it's no use, I have no more time. I have no choice but to take a chance.

"Well then, my <King> will escape to 14-D."

"But my <Pawn> is there. Does that mean you want to capture my <Pawn>?"

Nodding silently, he placed his own piece on top of his opponent's.

"Well then, go ahead and take a look."

As Mio spoke, he picked up her <Pawn> and looked at its back side.

On the back of the piece was the sticker of a clown with a strange smile.

"Aaah, it really was the clown!"

"Yep, Neight-kun lost!"

While she wrote down the result of the game on something like a record book, Mio cackled.

"Well, in the beginning you were doing pretty good, pretty good. Have diligence, boy. If you continue to practice for a long time, someday you may even become able to see the light of day."

……Mio-san's personality is changing.

"It's because I'm not good at games that require you to use your head."

It would take up to three hours for the train to reach its destination. During that time, the class had decided to have a board game tournament among themselves. Although it was Neight's first time playing this game, because everyone must participate he had been half forced to join the tournament. Furthermore, he had been unlucky and his opponent in the first game had been one of the potential winners, Mio.

"Besides, Mio-san is too strong."

"It's because I've heard that Xins-san also plays this game. I occasionally practice because I want to be his opponent one day. By the way, your playing style just now was the same as his."

The same as the Rainbow Color Reciter-san's?

"He appeared in the interview of some magazine a while back. 'At first Senpai forced me to, but then I started playing myself.' is what he said."

"Senpai?"

The outstanding Reciter and also the most famous, the Rainbow Color (Xins) Reciter. 'Senpai' was a word that didn't seem to match at all with Neight's image of him.

'Senpai', could it be Mother? No, but it probably should be someone who was in the same class as Xins and Mother. In any case, he couldn't think of another person who seemed to act like that.

"It's interesting, isn't it? All the more so because he didn't talk about it in detail. Whether or not it's a senpai who went to the same school as him, that person who Xins-sama calls 'Senpai' must be an amazing Reciter."

"No way. It's just my stubborn dad."

Slowly, the tanned girl casually raised her head and looked back from the seat one row in front.

"Ada-san?"

"Huh, Ada, do you know something about it?"

The girl waved her hand at them, giving off a feeling like she was smiling bitterly.

“Aah, don’t worry about it. I was just talking to myself .”

“……Ah, really…?”

Neight and Mio absent-mindedly spoke at the same time.

“Anyways, Mio, your opponent for the second round is me. Good luck.”

“Ah Ada, did you win your first round?”

Mio spoke up in surprise.

“Fufufu, try not to let your guard down. Actually, I play this pretty often.”

“Oh? I guess I’ll enjoy this then.”

For some reason, their eyes lit up suspiciously. Giving them a backwards glance, Neight stood up from his seat.

"Ouma-san, I'm going to go take a look around inside the train."

"Aah, the first section of the train is taken up by another school, so don't get lost."

Without looking up from the game board, the class representative casually waved his hand.

***

In the lead carriage which was set up as a private room—

"……You guys acting as scouts to the research institute, please be careful, alright?"

With a sigh, the female teacher wearing a suit the color of new leaves lifted her head as if she had suddenly thought of it. Sitting in a chair, Zessel watched her from the corner of his eye.

Teacher Kate, no, more like a teacher's advisor. She was an instructor of Blue Recitations. Although she hadn't been teaching for long, he had heard frequently in the

staffroom that she was an excellent homeroom teacher of first-year students.

"Alright. But I don't think it's a very difficult task. All we need to do is get the research institution to keep in contact with us, and then it will be over."

Enne spoke while stroking a decorative plant placed in a corner of the room.

—I highly doubt that.

Without speaking aloud, Zessel muttered in his mind. It was a habit of his childhood friend, Enne. Whenever she felt uneasy about something, she would always stroke a nearby plant.

The research institute that created the evil catalyst. And now, communications between them had stopped. Was it a simple malfunction in equipment, or did it involve something dangerous? Actually, last night, the headmaster himself had only whispered 'be careful' to them.

"Well, Enne and I will take it slowly and carefully."

……But he still felt anxious.

The report they had received from Mirror, who was in charge of gathering information, had been thirty pages long. It included the personal history up to five years ago of staff members, the research institute's financial investments, and even the business's achievements. However, the name of the researcher who manufactured the <Egg> was nowhere to be seen. That should have been the most important piece of information.

"Could Mirror-san have forgotten to include that?"

"Don't get your hopes up. When he was writing up such a report, do you really think that perfectionist would forget to include something so important?"

—In other words, information about the person responsible for manufacturing the <Egg> couldn't be found in either Tremia Academy's information department or even Kelberk Research Institute's headquarters.

"In the end, using that……"

In the middle of his sentence, Zessel shut his mouth. The sound of footsteps resounded in the aisle. It went on at a fast tempo, as if the person was running. The footsteps gradually approached them.

"Kate-sensei!"

At the sound of knocking on the door, the female teacher whose name was called out stood up from her seat.

"Ouma? What's wrong?"

"A student from another school riding in a different compartment started a fight with our class, and before I could stop it, a girl from our class was—"

"What do you mean?!"

Her expression stiffening, Kate quickly opened the door. Standing before her was an out of breath male student.

"A girl…… Was someone injured?"

But, contrary to her expectations, although he was breathing heavily, he appeared calm. Rather than seeming worried, his expression looked tired.

"Um, no…… Brave students such as Ada and Serges have already begun fighting back."

"Ah, the daughter of the Yung family? That's too bad for the other school then."

Without bothering to hide a bitter smile, Zessel stood up.

Ada Yung. Because of her special family circumstances , there wasn't a single teacher in Tremia Academy who didn't know about her. In other words, her situation was even more unique than the boy who was studying Night Color Recitations.

The Yung family was famous throughout the continent as a family of elite warriors, and she was their only daughter. The girl should originally have become the lead exorcist[Gillshe], but she drew attention to herself by attending a Recitation school. At that time, her

circumstances had become a popular conversation topic among teachers. Even the headmaster himself had asked her about her intentions.

"Ouma, has the dispute itself ended?"

"Umm, first of all, none of the girls in our class have been injured. ……Right now, our class is drinking high-grade (juice) sake to celebrate our victory. But it seems like there were some victims from the other school."

Aah, causing trouble already…… Kate closed her eyes with a worried expression. Patting her on the shoulder, Zessel stepped out into the aisle in her place.

"I was once an acquaintance with her father (Klaus-san), so I'll go. It's more fun doing something like this than sitting there and thinking."

"You'd better not get into the fight as well."

Did she mean that for real or as a joke? Her ambiguous tone of voice pierced her childhood friend like a nail. ……Yeah yeah, I understand.

"It sounds like the opponent's attitude could be problematic. You can read over some of the data that I'm

supposed to look over. After all, you should know that I get sleepy when I read something longer than a thousand words.”

“I’ve looked over it already.”

As expected of someone who had known him for a long time. Before he had realized it, his section of the documents had been stacked in front of Enne, who had just replied.

—Intervening in a fight, huh? It would be fun if the problem at the research institute was also that simple.

Holding back the words that he had almost muttered, Zessel began to walk towards the train’s rear compartment.

***

The rear end of the train was designed to be a vacant space resembling a terrace. It felt pleasant to stand beneath the summer sunshine with his uniform fluttering in the sudden gusts of wind.

"A trip with everyone, huh?"

Holding onto the railings meant to prevent falls, Neight absentmindedly gazed at the passing scenery.

……But Arma isn't here.

It was a change from the commotion inside the train. He couldn't hear anything other than the roaring of wind blowing past his ears and the screeching of the train's wheels on the rails.

In the hot temperature, it was pleasant to feel his uniform being swayed by the wind. However, he seemed to hear even the wind blowing with a somehow lonely sound.

Even though the trip's liveliness should be enjoyable, the companion he felt closest to wasn't here.

"—Hey, Arma. I'm riding a train for the first time in my life."

Although his voice was drowned out by the gusts passing over the terrace, he briefly spoke to himself. He didn't receive an answer. He shouldn't receive an answer

. Even so, following his usual habit, he spoke in the direction of his shoulder.

"It's really fast and seems really sturdy…… But hey, it's also slightly the opposite."

"Slightly scary?"

……That wasn't him just now.

The voice had come from somewhere close to him. He didn't even turn around. Because that voice belonged to someone he was very familiar with.

"—Kluele-san."

"I also snuck out of there."

The girl's scarlet hair fluttered in the wind. Before he could reply, she came over and stood beside him.

"Kluele-san, it seemed pretty tiring for you this morning."

"It's always like that."

She gave a bitter smile like it couldn't be helped. For a few seconds of silence, they stayed like that—

"I'm kind of relieved."

Gazing at the changing scenery, the girl beside Neight gently nodded.

"Eh?"

"I often hung out with you during summer vacation, but sometimes you would have a pained expression. I wondered what could be so painful……Although I expected it for the most part, you never confirmed my suspicions."

He never realized that about himself. He had simply been working hard on Recitations because he wanted to meet Arma and Mother again. He had intended to practice with that in mind. —At least, that was what he believed.

"Did I really have such an expression?"

"That's what you looked like before I called out to you just now."

Although she was smiling gently, her eyes seemed glow with a somewhat sad color.

"But I understand your reason for that, so relax. 'I want to hurry up and meet Arma again'. You seem to be facing your worries straight on."

Sensing other feelings hidden behind those words, Neight lowered his gaze.

……I see. I made her worry so much.

"—I'm sorry."

"I understand how lonely you feel, so you don't need to apologize. But hey."

She gently looked in his direction.

It was the same as always. It was the same as when they had been together during summer break. It was similar to Mother's serene expression.

"Mio and Kate-sensei and I, we're all here for you. It's fine if you rely on us more."

Could it be, that's the reason why Kluele-san had stayed with him throughout summer vacation?

"—The wind feels good, doesn't it?"

It seemed that she hadn't noticed his thoughts. No, perhaps she had noticed them long ago.

As if searching for something, the girl before his eyes lifted her head and gazed at the clouds.

"Since we were lucky enough to get the chance to go on this trip, we have to enjoy it, right?"

Part 3

The wind is……moist?

After he exited the train, Neight immediately felt a sense of discomfort and stopped in his tracks.

Immediately after he had left the station, the humid air touched his skin. The wind carried along a strange smell that seemed somehow nostalgic. That was probably due to being beside the sea.

—Speaking of which, did it feel like this when I rode on a boat?

His mother had taken him onto one just once. That time, he had gotten seasick and could barely look at the ocean, but he definitely remembered the smell.

“Oi, Chibi-kun. If you don’t come quickly, you’re going to get lost!”

Hearing the voice coming from somewhere far away, he reflexively corrected his pace. In the time he had absent-mindedly stopped walking, he had been separated from his group of classmates.

“Ah, coming!”

Shouldering his armful’s worth of luggage, he chased after his classmates.

“Eh? Ada-san, that’s…”

She carried her luggage in her left hand and held something long and narrow in her right hand. Wrapped in black cloth, its height exceeded that of her body.

"Hm? Ah, this? It's an old habit of mine. If I don't carry this, I won't feel relaxed."

So it really was the spear. But no matter how you put it, wasn't that a bladed weapon? In the first place, it was strange that their teacher Kate had given her permission to bring something so large.

"……It's because the teachers at school know about it. "

About what? Before he could ask that, the girl suddenly quickened her pace.

"Well, various things."

Muttering hastily, the girl remained quiet from then on . She stayed silent, so Neight didn't ask any further.

Please, don't touch it— her small back seemed to be saying that.

***

Looking up from the reddish-brown gate, a large grey school building shone under the sun.

Tremia Academy's branch school. Unlike the grassy lawn of the main school, the road here was covered in fine sand.

"Alright, let's disband here for now."

The homeroom teacher who was in charge of the class looked over her shoulder at the lobby of the building.

"The rooms for the boys in our class are the first and second ones on the east side of the third floor. The girls have the third and fourth rooms, on the west side. Go put down your luggage, and meet back in the central hall in thirty minutes."

Unlike the main school, this place had only one building. Therefore, it was twice as large as the first-year school building in the main school. The first floor was the lobby and the second floor had classrooms. The third floor seemed to have been turned into a living area.

"Well then, we're on the east side, so it's this way."

Gripping the room key, Ouma walked towards the staircase on the right.

"The layout of the hallways is the same as Tremia Academy's, isn't it?"

"It is a branch school, after all. Ah, the third room…… the second room……Is it here?"

He opened the door to their room. The sunlight that unexpectedly shone into his eyes made Neight involuntarily close his eyes.

"Oh, this is amazing!"

The boys said as they entered the room. Their gazes were focused on the window in front of them.

Peering through the glass— Looking down from the third floor, the scenery was completely dyed in blue.

In the distance, the horizon could be seen. A large, transparent azure sea seemed to stretch out past the ends of the world. Before that was a beach of white sand that extended out in a straight line.

……They could hear the sound of the waves. So it was that close.

"It's perfect weather for going down to the ocean. Hey, since it's the first day, how about we go play?"

Leaving their luggage in a corner of the room, what should have been all the boys in the class spread their arms.

"Eeh, don't we have classes from now on?"

"Oh, um. It was a joke, just a joke."

In a joking manner, he took out study materials from his bag.

"But hey, the girls must be feeling like that too. Only the teachers want to give a lecture."

"Is that so…?"

Kluele-san and Mio-san, he had simply thought that all of the girls would want to diligently listen to a lecture.

"Uwa, the weather's amazingly nice today. It really is the best for playing in the sea! There's barely anyone down at the beach. Could it be, is this Tremia's private beach?"

Setting down her mountaineering backpack, Serges ran to the window.

"Amaaazing! It feels like it's calling us to go and take a swim!"

Ada took off the top layer of her school uniform. What she seemed to be wearing below that wasn't a turtleneck sweater, but a swimsuit.

Holding swimming goggles in their hands, the two started running.

"Hey, hey. Wait, you two."

Instantly, Kluele grabbed their collars.

"Weren't you already told that it isn't allowed? And don't you guys understand that if I let you go, the teachers will get mad at me as a class representative? Or did you plan to go even knowing that?"

"Eh, aah. It was a joke, just a joke. ……Kluele has a really scary look in her eyes."

"Hey. Amazing and diligent people like us would never do such a thing."

Standing across from each other, the two spoke at the same time.

……Really now. Saying things like it was a joke and all that while wearing a swimsuit beneath their clothes.

"It didn't sound like you two were joking, that's why I seemed scary."

"Kululu, it must be tough being a class representative."

While taking out studying materials, Mio cackled.

"……Who would recommend me to be class representative instead?"

"Ehh, me, me!"

Really, was she serious or just being impudent? It was hard to judge from her smile, which contained not a shred of guilt. Well, she didn't dare confirm it.

"But won't the teachers also feel that way? There's no way they would give a lecture on such a hot day."

Putting on her uniform over her swimsuit, Ada complained.

……That's what I think too, but no teacher would openly say that, right?

"Ooh, is there really such a magnificent beach this close to us?"

As he held onto an armful of luggage, Zessel vigorously opened the window.

"There's barely anyone there! Let's get the students to do some self-studying and go down to the sea to pla—"

"Zessel. The students are waiting in the classroom."

The door to his room. He turned around and realized that before he knew it, the figure of his colleague had been standing there carrying a textbook in her arms.

"……H-Hey, Enne-san. So you were here?"

"Would you like to tell the headmaster what you just said?"

The female teacher gave him an unusual smile that he had never seen before. Although the weather should have been boiling hot, a chill shot up his spine.

"N-No, I'm fine. It was a joke, just a joke."

"In that case, hurry up and go to the lecture hall."

"……Yes, right away."

Reluctantly, he took out his teaching materials.

"While the students are studying hard, we can't neglect our duties either."

—Surely the students want to go out and play!

Grumbling inwardly, Zessel hurried after Enne.

When I think about it now.

At that time, wouldn't it have been good to relax a little? I think so.

At least to Enne and I, that day— the first day of camp was the first, last, and only time we could have fooled around.

3rd Play - I Wanted to Escape, But For Some Reason, I Couldn't Abandon It

Part 1

The sound of the fan, the sound of the clock's second hand counting time, and— the sound of the students' pencils quickly scratching.

The students glared silently at the sheets of paper on their desks.

Sitting in rows in the large classroom were seventy students listening to the lecture. But out of those, probably only a tenth of them were actually writing furiously.

……Like I thought, is it too difficult for first-year students?

At the front of the classroom, after giving the students a brief glance, Enne crossed her arms.

When students entered Tremia Academy, they had each selected a color to specialize in. The students gathered in this classroom were the ones who had chosen

[Arzus(White)]. When they entered this high school, they should have had at least some basic knowledge about their chosen color. Because of that— She had listed the small spirits that could be called out under [Arzus(White)'s] Second Scale Recitation(Noble Aria) and explained their differences and similarities compared to small sprits of other colors.

This was the topic that Enne had prepared.

However, the students had difficulty making comparisons with small spirits of other colors. Although they could write about the spirit of their chosen color, in other words, Pegasus, only a few students remembered the characteristics of [Surisuz(Yellow)'s] small spirit, Will-o'-wisp.

……They're only first-year students, so it can't be helped.

She breathed a small sigh as the preliminary bell rang, signaling that morning classes were almost over.

"Everyone, I'm sorry. It was unreasonable of me to expect that you could write about the other colors. It's fine to skip those sections and finish only the parts about [Arzus(White)]. Those of you who are finished can hand it in and break for lunch."

Sure enough, the students who had been complaining until now looked more relaxed.

“That’s right, Sensei was being too unreasonable!”

“Well, if I had asked you guys to only do this, you would have finished an hour ago.”

The students chatted as they handed in their exam sheets. When the line at the front of the room had dispersed, there was a mountain of paper on the podium. After that, the shadows of the students disappeared out of the classroom.

Was this everyone?

Rearranging the messy stack of paper, she looked around the classroom once again.

“Oh?”

In the corner of the classroom sat one last person. The figure of the single student sat in an inconspicuous location.

"What's wrong? It's fine, you don't need to do anything unreasonable."

"Nn, but there's only one color left that I can't write about. I somehow wrote about the other four colors already."

Looking down at her page, the student muttered.

"It was fine to only write about [White Arzus], so isn't it already excellent that you can write about the other colors as well?"

"……Umm, but that's the problem, Sensei."

The student finally raised her head. Her tanned, boyish features gazed straight at Enne.

"I wrote about all the colors other than [White Arzus]. But I can't remember what to write for the required one, [White Arzus]."

—Ada Yung.

She wrote about all of the colors except [White Arzus]? What did that mean?

“Can I take a quick look at it?”

She picked up the sheets of paper on the desk.

……What is this?

Keeping her hand still, she looked over what was written on the page.

Small yellow spirits (Will-o’-wisps)— Their outward appearance is a yellow sphere floating in the air. They do not speak the human language, but can understand simple commands. As for their size, statistically speaking, ninety-five percent of them are within 70 to 100 cm. One as large as 113 cm has been officially recorded. They float 60 to 80 cm above the ground and their movement speed is slow at 3 km/h. Because the abilities of Reciters are different, they can exist for roughly five hours. When they use their power, it shortens the time they are able to remain existing.

They give off a pale radiance when preparing for battle, so caution is necessary. They then extend pale tentacles that give off a high-voltage electric current to electrify the opponent. The speed at which they can stretch their tentacles is ten times their movement speed. The length of their tentacles is the same as the diameter of their body, although the longest ones have been recorded at 167.3 cm. They have at most three tentacles, which have a diameter of around 1 cm. Although they can attack horizontally or straight up into the air, they are unable to stretch their tentacles directly below them.

There are not particularly any special points to mention about them.

Difficulty to suppress: easy.

She didn’t mention anything at all about the catalyst and <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> that were essential to Reciters. Instead, she described in detail its biological features. It wasn’t knowledge necessary to conduct a Recitation. Or rather—Was this data necessary when confronting a Small yellow spirit (Will-o’-wisp)?

“Difficulty to suppress…… Easy?”

“Ah!”

As she murmured those words, the girl grimaced.

“Did I write that? It’s just a habit from a long time ago.”

“No, it’s not really a bad thing to write.”

She flipped through the pages. Things about the Recited creatures of other Recitation colors were written there. All of them consisted of detailed descriptions. They also didn’t mention catalysts or <Songs of Praise (Oratorios)>. It was simply a thorough, overwhelming list of biological data.

Perhaps she didn’t have enough time to write about [White Arzus]?

—No, that’s not right. She really could not write about it.

Ada Yung Gillshuvesher. Looking at the name that was written on the page, Enne finally understood the reason.

Small red spirits (Salamandes), Small green spirits (Aerials).

“Everything written on here is about offensive Recited creatures, isn’t it?”

The girl gave no reply. More than anything, her silence confirmed Enne’s guess.

That’s right. Pegasi and unicorns included in [Arzus’s (White’s)] Second Scale Recitations did not possess offensive traits. Therefore, she hadn’t learned about them.

It was like Enne had thought. All of this girl’s knowledge of Recited creatures was for the sake of fighting against them.

“Must I write about [Arzus (White)]?”

The student had on a troubled expression.

“Well. Since you’ve written so much already, just add something like ‘……Compared to what’s written above, there are few of [Arzus (White’s)] small spirits that have offensive characteristics.’ You can hand it in like that.”

"Ah, I see! So something like that also works!"

Nodding vigorously, the girl turned her focus back to the pages.

—Eh, she's not blinking?

Suddenly, Enne noticed that the girl's concentration was quite strong as she wrote quickly. It was different than how she normally acted in class. Enne had thought that she usually seemed to be easily distracted during class and wasn't a very enthusiastic student.

"Here, Sensei, I did it! Whew, it's finally finished."

The student cheerfully tidied up her desk. As she shouldered her bag, Enne called out to her back.

"Hey, Ada-san."

"Hm?"

"This is a personal question, but your father is Klaus-san, right?"

Her bright expression suddenly changing, the girl's eyes darkened.

"……Well, that famous person is something like my father."

Klaus Yung Gillshuvesher. He was the head of the Yung family of noble warriors and the leader of the several hundred Exorcists (Gillshe).

Exorcists (Gillshe)— They were people who had the closest connection to Reciters but at the same time were also complete opposites.

[Nussis], also called the Reverse Song, is a technique to send back Recited creatures. It can be conducted by holding a catalyst and directly touching the creature. For example, in the incident during the recital contest, in order to save Enne, Xins had used the Reverse Song by sacrificing his left arm. That technique was always dangerous.

"Do you also have an Exorcist (Gil) Spear?"

In response to that question, the girl unhesitatingly nodded.

"If a person is born into the family of Exorcists (Gillshe), they will definitely have one."

The Reverse Recitation was dangerous because it required directly touching the opponent. Therefore, a technique had been created to conduct the Reverse Song by using a spear instead of bare hands.

Gems of all five colors were embedded into the tip of the spear so that by piercing the target with it, the [Nussis] technique could then be used. A spear which undergoes that special treatment is called an Exorcist Gil Spear and a person who specializes in that technique is called an Exorcist Gillshe.

“Being from the Yung family, are you not thinking of going down the road of an Exorcist Gillshe?”

“……Who knows.”

The girl spoke ambiguously. Judging from her expression, she didn’t seem to be concerned about it.

Currently, other than the Yung family which was the main family of Exorcists Gillshe, there were also several other branch families. For many generations, children born in those families had traditionally become Exorcists Gillshe. Because the main Yung family was the originator of such

practices, they were traditionally treated as important people and given escorts. Even now, the warriors had a wide-spread status.

Ada Yung. If she wished, she could become well-known as Klaus's successor.

—No, there was no mistake that she had been practicing Exorcist[Gillshe] techniques.

This was indicated clearly by the results of her mock exam. Her knowledge was probably not something she had learned from books. All of her knowledge, just like her trained body, was something engraved into not her brain but the marrow of her bones.

"……Well, unfortunately, it seems I don't have much talent when it comes to that."

"Talent?"

"Yeah, yeah. When there are so-called practices or drills, I immediately run away."

Clasping her hands behind her head, Ada laughed with a self-deprecating expression.

"……But……"

Before she could finish speaking.

"Hey hey, Sensei, can I ask you one more thing?"

What could it be? Enne's gaze encouraged her to continue.

"Enne-sensei is the homeroom teacher of a higher grade, right? Why did you come to teach at the first-year students' summer school?"

"One of the teachers in charge of first-year students isn't very healthy. Because of that, I was called to join in at the last minute."

That was one of the questions she had assumed the students would first ask. She smoothly replied with her prepared answer. That's right, she had expected it to suffice as a response.

"Ah, that's a lie."

Suddenly, the girl's gaze became penetrating.

"Eh?"

"If that was the case, then there would be no reason for Zessel-sensei to come as well. You said it was at the last minute, so I have to accept that. Sure, there is a teacher in charge of first-year students who didn't come to summer school this time, but that teacher used to talk happily about coming on this trip, so it doesn't make sense that the teacher's health is the reason."

Her thorough reasoning put Enne at a loss for words. As she was arranging it with Zessel, she had certainly thought of this. But, she didn't think there would be a student who would think this deeply about it in the first place. In her mind, she had underestimated them.

—But she had never expected this girl, of all people, to ask about it.

Usually, no matter who talked about her, they would say that she was a troublesome child who was often late to class. Enne hadn't expected her to notice such a trivial issue. Even her teacher, Kate, hadn't told Enne about anything like that.

……What to do? Should she hastily make up a lie? Or should she vaguely talk around it?

"Um, that is…"

When she started to speak, the bell signaling the end of morning classes rang.

"Oh, it's finally lunchtime!"

In a completely different manner than the tense atmosphere from before, Ada turned around and ran towards the exit of the classroom without saying anything.

"Eh, w-wait! Ada-san?"

"Sorry, Sensei, but everyone in my class planned to go to the beach together this afternoon!"

Saying those words with an innocent smile, the girl quickly ran away.

"W-Wait!"

The moment when Enne began to chase after her—

The world outside the window flared up in scarlet.

"……Eh?"

The large classroom that she was in was on the second floor. Although she couldn’t clearly see everything from the window, a strange, raging fire burned before her eyes . It was a scarlet color more vivid than pure red. Rather than the color of flames, it looked more like the color of fresh human blood.

—Just what is going on?

It was an endlessly large scarlet inferno, as if even the heavens were burning. Because of the brightness, she couldn’t fully open her eyes. Outside the window should be a view of the plaza close to the schoolyard. If she remembered correctly, Zessel had made plans to teach a Recitation practical skills lesson there at this time.

Then was this Zessel’s doing? No, even using all of his power, he couldn’t call out these monstrous flames. In the first place, there was no reason for him to do such a thing in a practical skills lesson.

She gazed at the flames that dazzled her eyes, and then— Suddenly, the radiance went out.

“The flames disappeared……?”

The chain of events that quickly happened one after the other had made Enne unconsciously hold her breath.

The calmness from before was already returning to the world outside. As she watched, the sparks that had entered the classroom also faded away.

She quickly ran to the window. But looking down at the plaza, she didn’t see a single person.

Neither the students nor Zessel could be found. In other words, his lecture had already ended. Then sure enough, that wasn’t Zessel’s Recitation. Just who—

“Enne, are you there?”

Loud knocks came from the classroom door.

“Zessel!”

A rattle sounded as she opened the door. Her unusually well-dressed coworker entered.

“Zessel, did you see the flames in the plaza?”

“Yeah, it was so bright that I couldn’t not notice it.”

In an easygoing manner, he spoke with a cheerful tone and nodded. In other words, he didn’t seem to be moved by what had happened.

“Do you happen to know who called out those flames? ”

“Ah. When I was giving my lecture in the plaza a while ago, there was a single person whose hair color was unique, so I became interested. And then after the lecture ended, even though the other students returned to the school building, only that person didn’t go back. And when I couldn’t help but observe from the shade, it happened.”

No way, were the flames just now Recited by a student ? A student still in their first year of high school?

“Who is that student?”

Although Enne taught students in higher grades, she knew about students in other grades who excelled in Recitations. Even among first-year students, there were several students who she had begun to take notice of.

However—

"No, you wouldn't know who it is even if I told you."

He slowly looked up at the sky, as if pondering something.

"How can you be so certain?"

"……Because she wasn't one of the ones we were keeping an eye on."

Muttering in an unsure tone of voice, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Enne, do you remember the student who called out a lot of red feathers at the recital contest?"

Red feathers? In Recitations, feathers were not considered very difficult to call out. In the recital contest, there was a student who had Recited many birds instead of feathers and gotten a lot of attention. Even she remembered the face of the student who called out the birds, but in the case of feathers…

"……Nobody immediately comes to mind."

"Don't think too hard about it. I also couldn't remember at first."

During the recital contest, that student had been at the same level as the others. But by the time of this training camp, she had already improved to the point of catching Zessel's attention.

"So that's how it is. I don't know what she experienced from the recital contest up until now. But if she keeps developing at this rate, I'll have to take note of it."

As if Zessel seemed happy, his voice rose in pitch.

"Next year at this time, she will undoubtedly surpass other students of higher grades and become one of the top [Keinez(Red)] students. No, that might even happen in the middle of this year instead of next year. Anyways, in my point of view it's slightly scary. She's just an unpolished gem."

"As a teacher, isn't this a good time to show off your skill?"

"Well said. ……But still, I feel slightly uneasy."

He continued speaking in a vague manner that was unusual for him.

“After they succeed in a Recitation during the lecture, most students would happily come and tell me about it. But that girl was different. I guess it could be described as absentmindedness. She had a scared expression, and it felt like she wouldn’t talk to me unless I spoke first.”

Recitation is a ritual to praise the thing one wants to call out. Therefore, there are essentially no cases where one is surprised at what they Recited. Instead of being scared, her expression should have meant something else .

“Well, those are just my unreasonable fears. I mean, I hope they’re just fears.”

Although she knew the flames were already gone, Enne once again looked out the window and down at the plaza. In any case, there didn’t seem to be anything they could do about that girl.

“Thanks, I get the general situation now. I was worried . At first, I thought it was something the students had persuaded you into doing.”

“……Ah, really?”

As if he was sulking, Zessel turned away. Honestly, how child-like. As she laughed at his actions, Enne walked down the hallway in front of him.

“Well, let’s go. If we’re slow, we might not be able to make it back on time today.”

—Their destination was the place where the <Egg> had been manufactured, Kelberk Research Institute.

Part 2

“Well, let’s end it here for today.”

The teacher in charge of the class, Kate, closed her textbook.

“Alright. Thank you very much.”

“It’s already lunchtime, so I’m sorry that it ended a little late.”

“N-No, it’s fine…… It’s because I haven’t learned about this before.”

Putting the textbook into his bag, Neight frantically shook his head.

Tremia Academy's courses were based on a credit system, so other than the essential subjects, students could freely choose the courses they wished to take.

The course that Neight had been taking was one of the required subjects concerning Recitations, historical studies. This was an area he had learned nearly nothing about before being enrolled in Tremia Academy.

"Like I thought, was it too difficult studying one-on-one with a teacher?"

Gazing at him with a wry smile, Kate asked, amused. This course was one that his other classmates had all finished taking before summer vacation. Because of that, the left out Neight had ended up coming to one-on-one lessons with Kate.

"……Difficulty-wise, it really is hard."

"I'm glad you're being honest."

The teacher smiled happily.

"By the way, that Rainbow Color Reciter was also bad at this subject."

"Xins-san, you mean?"

"The director of education secretly told me about it. She used to be Xins-san's teacher."

The director of education, Jessica. He had met her only once when he was enrolling into this school. After that, he didn't remember having ever talked to her. She was often by the headmaster's side, and rather than being a teacher, she now seemed to be more like the headmaster's secretary.

"Was Xins-san an outstanding person ever since he was a student?"

"When he was a student, his grades seemed to be around average in his school. Or rather, he didn't seem interested in school lectures. And that includes the history that I was just teaching you. How contradictory, that a person whose name would be remembered throughout history wasn't interested in studying history himself."

—Speaking of which, Mother hadn’t taught him about Recitation history either.

Was that by chance, or was it something inevitable? In this aspect, Mother and the Rainbow Reciter were probably quite similar to each other.

“Now then, enough of our useless talking. Let’s go eat lunch. If you don’t hurry to the cafeteria, your seat will be taken!”

Ah, oh no! Speaking of which, hadn’t he been invited by Mio-san and Kluele-san to eat lunch together?

“Please excuse me, but I’ll be going on ahead!”

Carrying his bag under his arm, Neight hurriedly ran down the hallway.

***

In the hallway outside the first floor lobby, thick lush plants were planted at regular intervals, and a simple roof was built overhead to block the rain.

Leaning back against a beam that supported the roof—

Kluele gazed blankly at the roof overhead. Under the hot sun and hot wind, without wiping her forehead that was covered in sweat, she simply let herself enjoy the tranquil moment.

What broke the silence was the voice of her close friend.

“Ah, Kululu, you’re here!”

With quick steps, the girl with a familiar face ran up to Kluele.

“……Mio?”

Behind her, Neight could also be seen.

“Kululu, you didn’t come even though it was already lunchtime, so we were looking for you.”

"Eh, it's that time already?"

Rubbing her eyes, Kluele stepped away from the beam she had been leaning against.

"……Sorry, my class ended early, so I was spacing out for a bit."

"Honestly…"

Puffing up her cheeks, Mio crossed her arms in front of her chest.

"Mio-san and I went to take a look, and like we expected, the cafeteria is crowded. I don't think there will be a free seat for three people any time soon."

"It can't be helped. Let's go there to just buy lunch, then sit and eat at a bench outside."

The two exchanged glances and nodded.

"Ah……Mio, sorry, but could you help me buy my share as well?"

"Sure. That's right, the cafeteria is crowded, so I should just go by myself and buy all of our shares."

—No, that’s not what I meant.

Kluele had a different reason in mind. But she couldn’t say it out loud.

“……Kluele-san?”

They watched Mio hurry away in the direction of the cafeteria. After a little while, Neight looked up at her.

“Kluele-san, did something happen?”

“What do you mean?”

With his deep purple hair swaying in the wind, he looked anxiously at her.

“……For some reason, Kluele-san doesn’t seem very energetic today.”

Facing Neight, who looked up at her intently, Kluele couldn’t help but close her eyes.

—A part of you is really perceptive, isn’t it?

He had given off that impression since the very beginning. It wasn't that he was looking carefully at her face. Perhaps he was simply sensitive like that.

"Yeah…… I was just feeling kind of lost."

Like she was trying to deceive him, she tried to let out her best fake laugh.

……But what should she say? She couldn't find any suitable words. Therefore—

"Hey. Don't you feel scared?"

Kluele spoke honestly, the terribly direct words coming out of her mouth without being embellished at all.

"Scared?"

"About Recitations."

His eyes widened, perhaps because he couldn't guess the meaning behind her words. ……Like I thought, my question sounded strange.

"Hey. A while ago, didn't you see a huge blaze of fire that came from the plaza?"

"Ah, I saw that!"

With an excited expression, the boy spoke.

"It was amazing, wasn't it? Even Kate-sensei, who was with me at the time, was surprised. It seemed like the other teachers went to investigate the cause of that. Because of that, my lesson ended a little late."

"—Neight."

"The one who called that out was me."

"……Eh?"

There was a silence that lasted for more than a few seconds. Neight stood there, forgetting to breathe.

"That can't be…… No, but…… No way, it was Kluele-san?"

"You can't believe it, right? But it's true."

That’s right. It was natural that he couldn’t believe her right away.

Because after all, she couldn’t even believe it herself.

“During the recital contest, I unexpectedly called out the Divine Bird Phoenix of Dawn, right? After that, I felt a bit strange. You might think what I’m saying is a bit weird, but…”

She took a breath. As the faint sound lingered in the air—

Looking down at the palms of her hands, Kluele apprehensively continued.

“My Recitations are going too well.”

“Too well?”

Shocked, he repeated her words like a baby.

“Sorry. I might seem like I’m bragging, but…… That’s really not the case. I’m actually really scared.”

During this morning’s practical skills lesson, the Recitation she had conducted to solve the situation had

been done so easily that she had thought it was strange. Without even singing a Song of Praise (Oratorio), the time it took for her to Recite had only been a few seconds.

No, it wasn't just that. She had also involuntarily thought that the Recitations of the other students were terribly immature.

Their imagination and Songs of Praise (Oratorios) had been too childish. She had easily been able to see through the parts of their Recitations. She had felt the illusion that there was nothing she couldn't do in Keinez (Red Recitations).

"Surely I'm misinterpreting it. Speaking of which, when class was over and I was left alone, I secretly tried to Recite some fire…… The catalyst was ordinary red paint."

The result was that tremendous flame. She was truly glad that nobody had been nearby when it happened. If there had been someone close beside her— They wouldn't have received just a burn.

"……That was really scary."

With both hands, Kluele hugged her own body. It wasn’t that she was cold or that she was shaking. It was because her agitated heart and scalding body felt nearly painful. No matter what she did, it wouldn’t subside.

Perhaps it was a side effect of calling out a True Spirit during the recital contest. Surely it was because she was still in a state of excitement. But that also seemed wrong.

“I don’t want something like this to happen! I didn’t call out the Divine Bird for this purpose……”

She felt like the higher-grade students she had seen at the recital contest, who relied on power and violence. What would she do if she overestimated herself and her Recitation ended up spontaneously discharging? It wouldn’t be like the five-colored hydra back then, but there was definitely a chance that she could call out something dangerous.

When she had realized that possibility, she had felt cold and light-headed.

“That’s why I suddenly feel afraid of Recitations.”

Before the sound of her words vanished…

“—But.....”

The boy who usually acted quiet and reserved said in an abnormally strong tone of voice.

“But, I don’t think Kluele-san will become like those higher-grade students or conduct such a scary Recitation.”

I’m happy you’re saying that. But, it’s useless. I……

“After all, I believe in you.”

Please, right now, don’t look at me with those eyes.

“Thank you…… But, I’m sorry. I can’t even believe in myself right now.”

She involuntarily averted her eyes. His excessively straightforward gaze felt painful to the point of hurting.

“—Kluele-san.”

Suddenly, his tone of voice changed.

“Please. ‘I can’t even believe in myself’……Please, please don’t say such sad things.”

Although she should have averted her eyes, she couldn’t help but turn her gaze towards him—

Like the surface of an overflowing fountain.

She couldn’t help but look at his shaking, quivering black eyes.

……Neight?

“Kluele-san is not someone who can't believe in herself . Because after all, Kluele-san is feeling this scared.”

Suddenly, without warning—

“……W-What’s wrong?”

He gently grasped her hand in both of his.

“H-Hey, Neight?”

“It will definitely be alright. If it’s Kluele-san’s Recitation, no matter what it is, I won’t be scared. If your Recitation is scary, I will be there together with you.”

N-No, that’s not what I meant. My hand…… Why so suddenly—

“It’s a good luck charm.”

The boy smiled. From the corner of his eye, a small droplet appeared.

“Kluele-san did the same for me during the recital contest.”

……I did?

'It's okay. I will stay with you. Let's call it out together.'

What had happened on that day replayed in her mind, word for word.

"I love Kluele-san's Recitations. They are more gentle and beautiful than anyone else's. They're lovely. …… That's why, please, don't say that you can't believe in yourself."

He spoke in a stammering manner, the flow of his words anything but smooth. Even so, he tried his best to convey his feelings as strongly as he could..... And those feelings reached her.

—I see.

So you believe in me that much.

With an odd sensation, something blossomed in her chest. Painful at first, it was a strange feeling that couldn't be put into words, but that feeling gradually changed into a gentle warmth.

I had always thought that I wanted to do what I could for you. ……But, I was wrong. I was actually making you worry so much about me, wasn’t I?

“Um, could it be that you’ve forgotten what happened that time?”

With lonely eyes Neight looked up at her, who had been silent all this time.

“Don’t be silly. There’s no way I would forget.”

With a finger, she poked the forehead of the boy who was gazing at her.

“……That hurts.”

“It shouldn’t hurt. You’re a boy, aren’t you?”

Like she was teasing him, Kluele winked.

—I’m sorry for making you worry.

But, I’m a bit relieved. I won’t say that I can’t believe in myself anymore.

“……Hey.”

Somehow, you're a really strange person.

Sometimes I think of you like a little brother to take care of, and other times I think of you like a friend who gets depressed easily. You should be just a normal classmate, but— For some reason, I can't leave you alone. I think of you as someone very important to me.

I still don't really understand it.

"I wonder what to call the relationship between us."

Hey, what do you personally think?

"Eh, r-relationship? Umm…… classmates?"

After thinking it over for a while, he replied seriously in a troubled voice.

Yeah. That's definitely true for now, but—

"But hey, don't you think that might change from now on?"

"Change?"

"Fufu, I wonder."

“Eh, please tell me!”

Looking up at her, the boy puffed up his cheeks. It was such an innocent gesture. Like she thought, he might still be a bit unreliable to become a knight who protects his princess.

“I still don’t understand it either. Well, never mind that. ……Ah, Mio’s back. Now, where would be a good place to eat?”

“……That’s not fair, Kluele-san!”

“Come on, we have to hurry and eat lunch. After all, aren’t we going to play at the beach with everyone else in our class this afternoon?”

Part 3

Bright, dazzling rays of heat poured down from the sky overhead. Grains of finely-ground coral seemed to be spread over the white sand. The ocean was a transparent azure blue. The clear waves lapping back and forth seemed to wash away even everyday troubles.

What was called Tremia's campus was also like a type of private beach. It could be appropriately described as exactly like paradise.

However— Although the scenery was beautiful, Ouma and the male students were interested in another matter.

"……That Neight, he's attractive, isn't he?"

In the shade, sitting down on the sandy beach and gazing forward was a single boy in a swimsuit.

"Aah, and to make it worse, he doesn't even know his own worth…"

Holding juice in his right hand, a fan in his left, and also wearing sunglasses, Ouma reluctantly nodded.

There was a kid having fun playing a game with ten-odd girls in swimsuits.

"Hey, Neighty, go over there! Catch!"

"Eh……Ah, eh……?"

A young boy futilely chased a ball being blown away by the wind. Because he wasn't accustomed to the sandy beach, he ran unsteadily, his sense of balance even more off than before.

"Ah, ah, ah—!"

The unreliable boy yelled. Soon after, the ball fell onto the sand with a quiet thump.

"Ahaha! That's no good, Chibi-kun."

"But he's so cute—"

"Yep. I'll forgive you because you're cute! I mean, it's more fun this way!"

The cheers when he failed to catch the ball were louder than when he succeeded.

It wasn't that he made a particularly amazing play, but that the times when he missed were funny. The girls found those times more amusing.

"……Is that it? Is that the charm of the young thirteen-year-old boy?"

"For a boy, his face looks quite androgynous. He's also short and fragile. To the girls, is he considered more like someone to tease, or someone to play around with?"

In the beginning, they had been wrong to not consider this boy as their rival. In reality, he was a formidable enemy who had transferred into their school.

"Hey, speaking of which, where did the other boys go?"

Some of them had gone to a nearby convenience stand, while others were having fun diving in the ocean. Even though they were each doing what they wanted, there still seemed to be only a few people.

"Hm. Look at that over there."

Ouma nodded in that direction. There, holding the ball that she was playing with and frowning, was a blonde girl with a childish face, as well as a girl with scarlet hair who was watching with an amused look.

"Huh. That's strange. According to the theory in the volleyball book…… If I hit it here like this, the ball should fly up. But I don't understand why Kluele, who hasn't read any book about this, is better than me……"

"Mio, I already told you, you're too reliant on books. If you don't practice for real, you won't get better at it."

"……I see. Perhaps you're right."

"But more importantly, you didn't practice swimming either?"

"Yeah, but in that case, if I start reading a book about swimming right now—"

"……You just don't listen to what people tell you, do you?"

He gazed briefly at the scene.

"What's wrong with Mio and Kluele?"

"They're just thoughtless people. Coming on this trip seems to be a good chance to confess to them."

Ohhh. Letting out a small sigh of admiration, one of the male students stole a glance at where the girls were gathered. Looking at them, he could clearly see the reason why several of the boys had their eyes on them.

Mio Lentear— She had gotten the best in their grade on the written exam and was rumored to be a genius. Along with that, she was also a girl whose lovely smile and calm manner made her stand out. Her behavior of treating everyone equally had earned her deep trust from both students and teachers.

And then there was Kluele Sophi Net. She had a very helpful personality, an unforgettable appearance, and excellent reflexes. Even though she only scored moderately well on exams, that was just another part of her charm.

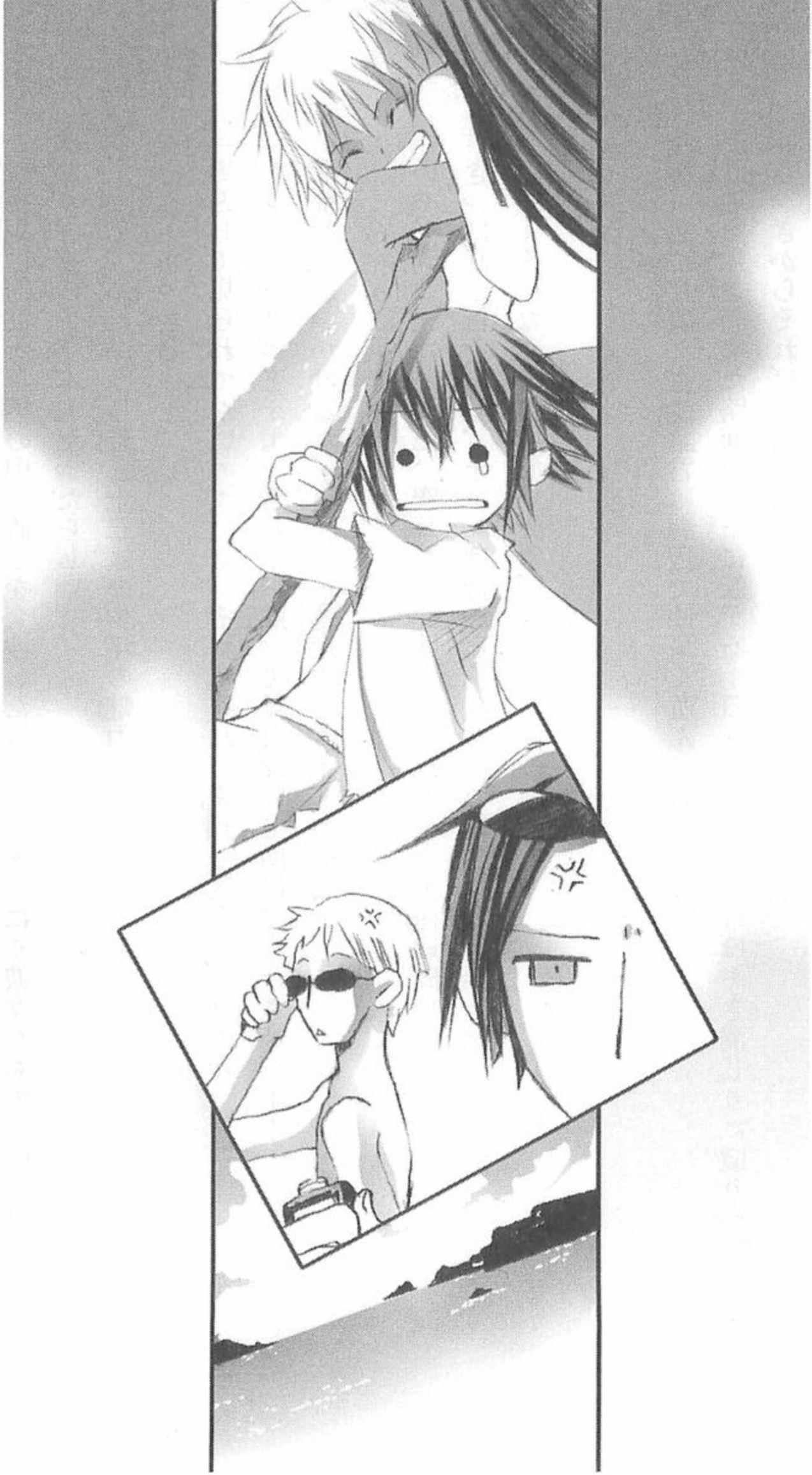
“So, what was the result?”

“The girls said something like ’……I’m sorry, but about that sort of thing, we still aren’t—’ The several people who were involved are currently feeling heartbroken. They seem to have gone to a part of the beach farther away from here to nurse the wounds in their heart. So, let’s leave them alone for now.”

"……I'll be next."

"Stop it. More and more people seem to be having their confessions backfire."

Throwing him an indifferent look, Ouma pushed up the bridge of his sunglasses.



"Alright, the next person to drop the ball will face a punishment! Whoever drops the ball will have to go to tomorrow's lectures in their swimsuit!"

While all of the girls cheered excitedly, a single boy's face paled.

"Eh. W-Wait……I have a bad feeling about that……"

"Well, let's start, Neighty!"

"U-Uwa! Why is the ball suddenly moving so fast?"

"Oh, wasn't that a nice catch, Neight-kun. Well, one more time!"

"Eh, W-Why…… No, please don't— Wah!"

"Tsk. You survived for the second time in a row, hm?"

"U-Umm……Did you just click your tongue just now?"

"Alright, this time for sure! Chibi-kun, I challenge you for the third time in a row!"

“Uwaaa! So you are aiming at me, aren’t you?!”

“Ah, Neighty ran away! Everyone, chase after him!”

“Hey, even though they forbid boys to play with them, why is only Neight allowed?”

One of the boys said in a tone sounding like he had already given up.

“Rather than being allowed, it seems more like forced participation.”

In the afternoon, the male students had all planned to go to the beach together during their free time. When they had gathered, amongst almost all of the students, Neight had been nowhere to be seen.

When all of the boys Ouma gathered had gone looking for him— They had suddenly heard a grating shriek. When they went to take a look…… There was the figure of a boy whose limbs had been bound by several female students and was being dragged far away.

Although they had tried negotiating with the kidnappers for the hostage, unfortunately, the girls’ true

intention didn’t seem to be a ransom, but the boy himself .

“……Kuh, is that the charm of the thirteen-year-old boy?”

He had heard those words a little while ago.

“To not be seen as a man, that sure is pitiful.”

“W-Wait a moment, Ouma-san! Please don’t just silently watch, help me!”

Even now, Neight was still running away from the group of girls chasing after him.

“……What did Neight say just now?”

“I’m not sure, I couldn’t hear him either. You probably misheard him. I definitely didn’t hear anyone asking for help.”

Shaking his head with certainty, Ouma took out the magazine he was in the middle of reading from his bag.

……Damn, what an enviable guy.

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“Ahh. I wonder if the students are playing around nicely at the beach right now.”

Walking down a road covered in sand, Zessel kicked at the pebbles scattered by his feet as he grumbled.

“That’s all they seemed to be doing a while ago.”

Enne, who walked beside him, smiled wryly.

“Mirror is stuck inside the information department, so you should feel glad compared to him.”

“But he hates the ocean. After all, he can’t swim.”

“……Even now, he still can’t swim?”

Mixed into his colleague’s voice was a teasing tone.

According to the books about swimming that I’ve read , using this theory, I should be able to stay afloat— Back in the time of Elfand school, in a pool 1.2 meters deep,

just how many times had that intelligent person said those words and nearly drowned?

“Hey, do you remember our graduation trip to the beach?”

“Although it was quite a long time ago, I still do, more or less.”

Letting out a small laugh, Enne covered her mouth with her hand. It wasn’t the ladylike laugh that she normally showed as a teacher, but because Zessel and Mirror were her childhood friends, it was the lively laugh she secretly showed them.

“Since he’s a teacher of Blue Recitations, it’s unusual that he dislikes the ocean of all things.”

Their graduation trip had been five days long. At the very end, only Mirror hadn’t gone swimming in the ocean even once.

“Well, a certain someone had to use a flotation device even when she was sixteen.”

“I can swim now, you know. I already did special training for it.”

"Is that so? Did you pack a flotation device into your bag this time as well? Enne-sensei, you seem to be quite eager to go swimming."

"……How do you know about it?"

Idiot, I tricked you into saying that.

Annoyed, Enne pouted. Zessel smiled faintly as she did so— Abruptly, their casual conversation died off.

From the sandy road, they turned a corner and onto an area where dry, hard soil covered the ground.

"……Well then, shall we pay them a visit?"

Zessel let out the breath he had been holding.

Kelberk Research Insititute, Fidellia branch.

Casting a backward glance at the name of the place carved into the large brown rock, they stepped through the open gateway.

……So it's open, huh?

The inside of the facility wasn’t very wide. There were only weeds growing thickly all over the place.

“Is anyone there?”

“Just like it seems, I don’t think there’s anyone inside.”

“Well, to anyone inside, excuse us for coming in!”

At the front door of the research facility, they pressed the buzzer meant to be used by visitors, which was beside the door. A mechanical sound echoed throughout the inside of the building. The reverberations were even transmitted back to them, who stood by the door.

“At least we can confirm that it rang.”

—But why was there no response from inside?

He winked at the woman beside him. As if his intentions had been conveyed to her, Enne silently gave her approval.

While hiding an emergency catalyst in his left hand, he opened the door of the research institute with his right hand. With a rusty creaking sound, the door slowly opened.

“……It’s dark?”

Although he thought that the lights would be on, a curtain of darkness stretched out before him so that he couldn’t see more than a few meters in. Sure enough, something strange was going on.

Sunlight from outside shone through the open door. Little by little, his view of a few meters grew wider—

The scene in the entrance hall reached his eyes.

“……!”

Enne let out a soundless scream.

Clutching the shoulder of the woman who had collapsed to the ground, Zessel barely managed to keep calm.

……This must be some sort of joke, right?

Stone statues. Or at least, that was what they first thought. That’s right. Decorating the front lobby were things resembling monuments.

After gazing carefully at them however, Enne and Zessel realized that those were not simply stone sculptures. Even if they didn’t want to, they couldn’t help but understand. The sculptures were just too realistic, and too repulsive.

They had read about it many times in things like fairy tales. But until now, they hadn’t believed for an instant that such a phenomenon could become reality.

The features of the stone statue looked afraid. The forms of the stone sculptures looked like they were running for their lives.

—Before Enne and Zessel’s eyes were the staff members of the research institute, who had turned to stone.

Part 4

He heard the sound of small waves lapping against the shore and the quiet sound of his shoes stepping on white sand. Although every step was the same, the sound was different each time, making him unable to get bored of listening to it. To Neight, going on a stroll down the beach while enjoying the sea breeze was a new experience.

“Ah, a seashell!”

Its outward appearance was deep purple, while the inside was red. Neight picked up the bivalve, which had an unusual hue.

“……Should I give this to Kluele-san?”

The sea wasn’t blue like it had been at noon, and the horizon was dyed by the sunset. It was just before night fell. Therefore, it was probably during this time when he felt the closest to the sun.

Suddenly, mixed in with the ocean spray, the sharp sound of something slicing through the air reached his ears.

—Eh?

Directly ahead of him, the figure of a person appeared on the beach he'd previously thought was empty. As he advanced closer, the tempo of the sound increased. It didn’t just become faster, but also more powerful.

Deja-vu.

The girl who swung her spear while bathed in the light of the setting sun overlapped with the image of what he had seen on the rooftop a few days ago.

“Ada-san?”

The first time, he had felt pure amazement. The second time he saw her wielding the spear, Neight finally understood how intense it was.

When he had seen it before, only the elegance of her movements had reached his eyes— But now, along with the beauty of the girl swinging her spear, her sharp and honed actions sent chills down his spine.

Despite the sand underfoot that made it difficult to move freely, there wasn’t any change in her movements. But rather, it made her steps and leaps silent. He couldn’t hear the sound of her kicking the sand.

It was too tranquil. Her movements flowed too serenely.

The spear-wielding club. But what she was doing wasn’t at the level that a mere club member could achieve.

……It’s different. Something is different compared to back then.

Even as an amateur, Neight still clearly understood. Although he had been surprised when he saw the girl up on the roof, her movements right now seemed to go beyond that to the point of making an observer feel afraid.

Furthermore— The girl held the spear with only one hand, but her whole body moved along with it, making it spin at an even higher speed.

That’s right. Back then, on the rooftop, she had dropped her spear.

In her one hand, it turned, rotated, revolved.

Ten times, twenty times, thirty times.

No matter how much time passed, she didn’t drop the spear.

Suddenly, the girl’s movements stopped. She let out a small sigh. She had been moving so much under the hot weather, but her breathing hadn’t changed at all.

"……This is the second time, right, Chibi-kun?"

Seeming like she felt both troubled and embarrassed, with a complicated expression, Ada smiled bitterly.

"U-Um. Is it special training with your spear again?"

"Half right and half wrong. But I guess you could interpret it that way."

After that, their conversation stopped. Neight thought that she would continue speaking, but she simply gazed at the spear she held with an almost sorrowful look.

"Ada-san, that was really amazing!"

"Hm, amazing?"

"Even though you played around with everyone for so long this afternoon, you're still doing that special training in the evening."

Everyone else in the class was currently resting in their room. Even Neight had been sleeping until now, and had only woken up a short while ago.

"Well, it's already become a habit to me, just like eating dinner. That would happen to anyone who has been doing this for ten-odd years already."

Ten-odd years? She should have joined the spear-wielding club after entering Tremia Academy, and not more than half a year should have passed since then.

"For Chibi-kun, it's because of that, right? You want to become a Reciter because you want to complete the Recitation that your mother left you."

"Yes. I haven't decided whether I should become a Reciter or what, but first I want to be able to conduct Mother's Recitation."

"—I see."

Tightly gripping the spear, the girl slowly looked up at the sky.

"……Chibi-kun might get angry, but I can't do something like that. I can't do anything about it, even though I've already run away."

Slowly, slowly, like she was trying to persuade herself to tell him, the girl exhaled.

“In my case, the family that I was born in is special. Do you know the Exorcists (Gillshe)? To put it simply, it’s a group that specializes in sending back Recited creatures.”

Exorcists (Gillshe). No matter how far he reached into the depths of his memories, he couldn’t come up with anything relating to that word.

“……I’m sorry, but I still haven’t learned enough about such things.”

“No, it’s natural that Chibi-kun doesn’t know about them. They don’t call things out, but send them back. They’re not very well-known. After all, they can’t do flashy things like calling out enormous creatures, so their reputation is naturally lower compared to Reciters’. And out of those who do know about the Exorcists (Gillshe), very few want to become one. That’s why being an Exorcist (Gillshe) is passed down through the family, from father to child.”

Say a Recited creature was running wild in a certain city. At that time, if another Recited creature was called

out to oppose the first one, the battle between those two would probably wreck the city. For example, during the recital contest, if another hydra had been called out to oppose the first hydra, it wouldn't be difficult to imagine the city turning to ruins.

If that situation were to occur, in order to suppress the Recited creature while keeping collateral damage to a minimum, a Reverse Song is the best option. But for nearby Reciters, for example in a situation with only Mio, Kluele, and other girls, it would be extremely dangerous to try and touch the wild Recited creature.

Therefore, 'Reverse Song professionals', who had the knowledge and skill for conducting Reverse Songs and a trained body and mind to oppose the wild Recited creature, were needed.

"That was the reason for forming the group of Exorcists (Gillshe) that exists now. Of course, even now, I think the people who are working hard as Exorcists (Gillshe) are amazing. After all, it's a job that requires them to have a strong body and to risk their lives. They can't skip out on a certain amount of training for even a single day. That's why they're people who deserve to be respected."

But— Letting out a long breath that resembled a sigh, Ada looked down.

“But even so, they aren’t very well-known at all. They don’t even have a specialized school like Reciters do. They just train alone by themselves, inconspicuously. … …The pronunciation of the word Exorcist[Gillshe] seems to have a special origin, but my dad won’t tell me. I can’t help but wonder, is it just because they felt inferior compared to Reciters?”

She smiled in a self-deprecating manner. Unsure of how to respond, Neight quietly averted his gaze.

“Ada-san’s father is also an Exorcist[Gillshe], isn’t he?”

“……Yeah. He’s the head of the main Exorcist[Gillshe] family, the Yung, and also probably the best Exorcist[Gillshe]. Apparently he’s been to many places around the continent and knows many people. One time he gathered together all of his acquaintances, and even that Xins-sama was there.”

“Xins-sama was?”

Among Reciters, there were ten-odd large factions formed based on personal connections and the school one studied at.

There were many merits to being in such organizations , such as obtaining jobs, self-promotion, and meetings with famous people. The names of Tremia Academy's teachers were probably also classified into a group formed by the school's administration department. After graduating from Tremia Academy, it was a custom that students would first join that group.

The Rainbow Color Reciter, Xins. From what Neight had heard, for some reason, only Xins hadn't joined a single association. He had received a lot of invitations of course, and as long as he would show his face to the public, any group would have accepted him as an executive member. And yet, he still liked to act alone, on his free will. A while ago, he had attracted a lot of attention because of that.

"Well, Xins-sama seems to only be willing to participate as an observer. It seems that sometimes, he even comes to visit my home. But usually it's when I'm at school."

"……That's amazing……"

"And it's not just Xins-sama, but many other people as well. My dad has many colleagues who people would think of as strange or amazing. In fact, that gathering seemed to be something more like a hangout."

Neight was speechless. Ada had such an amazing father. That's right. That's what a regular human would think, that it was an astonishing thing.

But— The eyes of the girl who had told him all of this trembled with a sad color.

"I was born as the heir to that great leader, so…… I sometimes feel pretty restricted. I have a predetermined daily routine, a predetermined path, and a predetermined future. Even though other children played with their friends, I was always by myself, gripping my Exorcist Gil Spear."

The gemstones on the tip of the spear shone. Those were probably the catalysts used for sending back Recited creatures.

She had called her spear an Exorcist Gil Spear. Speaking of which, the spear he had seen from when she had been practicing on the rooftop was a simple spear with no such workings.

"……You noticed?"

Like she was smiling while crying, she faintly curled up the edges of her mouth.

"Because I'm always used to use an Exorcist Gil Spear, my body is used to something of that weight and length. But the spear-wielding club has spears of its own designated standard, so things like its weight are completely different. Because of that, I don't feel comfortable using it …… I often make mistakes when using the club's spears. "

Back on the rooftop, when she dropped the spear, Neight remembered how she had glared down at it. Now , he felt that he better understood the meaning behind her gaze at that time.

"Are the spears used by the club and your Exorcist Gil Spear that different?"

"No, not really. It's just that I've become too used to my Exorcist Spear. I know its weight up to 0.1 grams and its reach up to 0.1 millimeters. That's why I'll be thrown off if it's even a bit different."
Gil

0.1 grams and 0.1 millimeters. She spoke those words like it was completely natural.

But was something like that really possible? At least for Neight himself, he couldn't even remember the length of the pen he normally used, nor did he have the confidence to take a guess.

"Ada-san, could it be that you can use the Reverse Song and several colors as well?"

The technique for using the Reverse Song was similar to that of normal Recitations, meaning that one had to understand each color separately. Then in the case of someone who specialized in sending back Recited creatures…

"……Yeah. Even though my memory isn't that good, in order to use the Reverse Song, I've remembered the details of several colors."

The way she said it made it seem like learning the Reverse Song was easier than learning Recitations. There were probably teachers in Tremia who were masters of several colors. But that was different when it came to students.

—But Neight had never seen this girl bragging about such a thing.

She wasn’t the type of person to lie. But still, Neight couldn’t believe it so quickly. Because what she had just told him was something that went against his common sense.

“If I say it, I’ll just be called an idiot. This guy was…… my first friend.”

Hugging the spear embedded with gemstones, the girl stood up straight.

“No, not just a friend. It’s already become like a part of me. We’re always, always together. No matter if it’s weight or length, there’s nothing we don’t know about each other— There’s that kind of connection between us. ”

……But even that’s not important anymore.

Her hoarse voice softly flowed out from her small lips.

“For just a little while, I wanted to try going down a path other than what my heritage decided for me. The truth is, my mother has qualifications as a Reciter, so I was interested in Recitation schools ever since I was young.”

“……I see.”

“I made a lot of friends after coming to Tremia Academy. Although it can’t be compared to Chibi-kun’s situation, I’m really glad I came here.”

After being blessed with many friends and joining a club, she had enjoyed school life from the bottom of her heart. Neight could tell from the way that Ada normally behaved.

But— He couldn’t understand.

“Ada-san.”

There was just one thing, one thing that he couldn’t understand at all.

"But if that's so, why are you still practicing like this with the Exorcist Gil Spear?"

That's right. Why? With trembling lips, Ada muttered to herself as if she were speaking a soliloquy.

"……I don't understand very well either. But it's probably because I don't want to regret it anymore."

Regret?

"Yeah. I don't want to have that dream anymore."

That dream. Regret. What did that mean?

No matter how long he gazed at the girl's face, the depths of her wavering eyes hid something important and only reflected a distant scenery.

Part 5

"……Even the folds on its clothes have been made this accurately."

Without touching it, Zessel moved forward as close as he could to the stone statue in front of him.

There were around ten stone statues. Although he hadn’t seen it yet, Zessel felt that even the fibres of their clothing had been created perfectly. At first, simply seeing the look of fear on the statues’ faces had been enough. The statues portrayed a realism that couldn’t be matched by simple carvings.

“It seems like we were right.”

“These people have been turned to stone…… I can’t believe it……”

His colleague, the female teacher, staggered back. Patting her shoulder forcefully, Zessel advanced a step forward.

“Enne, don’t touch the statues. We don’t know what tricks there could be, so we need to be as careful as we can.”

“—I’ll contact the headmaster.”

Enne spoke like she had suddenly thought of it.

“Let’s wait until we have more to report.”

That’s right. After all, they still hadn’t gone beyond the entrance hall of the research institute. Beyond this, farther inside, what could have happened? At the very least, they needed to investigate the cause of this situation.

“……Right.”

A white light penetrated the darkness in the hall.

“Let’s go.”

In Enne’s left hand was a white sphere of light she had called out.

“Please, could you illuminate the way in front of us and slowly advance forward?”

Although it had the appearance of an inanimate object, it was actually a light fairy that was categorized under Third Scale Recitations. When it sensed danger, its light would turn off. It was a Recitation that the White Reciter liked to use when exploring.

Prime Aria

Enne

The light was able to illuminate up to ten meters ahead of them. Within that area, there were no more stone

statues. At least they didn’t have to worry about that for now.

However, instead.

—What’s with this ash?

Gazing down the hallway, they slowed their steps.

Scattered in a corner of the hallway was a large amount of ash. Was it the remains of something burning? No, if that were the case, there should be burn marks inside the research institute.

“I don’t know what it is, but we probably shouldn’t step on it.”

“That’s true— Huh?”

A sound suddenly reached Zessel’s eardrums. The scraping noise made him reflexively turn around.

“What’s wrong?”

Enne, who had been taking the lead, stopped. Before Zessel responded, he first needed to confirm if anything was behind them.

Nothing was there…… Was it his imagination? Was it just his nerves acting up?

“No, It’s nothing.”

As he spoke, the light of the light fairy suddenly vanished.

“Eh?”

At the same time as Enne spoke, their surroundings once again became engulfed in darkness.

The light fairy suddenly turned off? Moreover, it turned off quickly, too quickly.

Like they expected, something was in the research institute with them. Something alive!

——[Red Song Keinez]——

With the catalyst he held in his right hand, Zessel called out a handful of flames.

Although it wasn’t as bright as the light fairy, he could see a few meters ahead of him with this……

At that moment, he couldn’t believe what he saw in front of him.

……Hey, wait a moment. ……What is it…?

From the wall beside Enne, who had been walking in front of him— Like it had been fused with the grey wall, a large snake with scales of the same grey color slithered forward.

“Enne, get down!”

“Eh?”

His sudden warning backfired. Taken aback, Enne turned to look in his direction. In other words, she turned her back to the mysterious snake. The snake lifted its head……

“Enne!”

Opening its mouth, the snake attacked.

There was no time to hesitate. With all of his strength, Zessel pushed his vulnerable colleague towards the opposite wall.

The sound of something piercing his shoulder echoed out. The sound was so amazingly detailed that there was no time for him to feel afraid.

However, the sharp pain of the snake's fangs piercing his shoulder was real.

"……Agh!"

"Z-Zessel!"

There was no time to respond to her call.

With his right hand, he grabbed the head of the snake that had bitten his left shoulder and refused to let go. Using all of his strength, he tried to pull it off. But the snake's fangs tightly latched on.

"You……!"

He grabbed the flames that he had called out to use as a light, and thrust it directly at the snake's head.

Burned by the flames, the snake floundered back and forth. Gripping the snake by the neck, Zessel quickly pulled it away from his shoulder. With all of his strength, he slammed the struggling snake onto the floor. The

snake lay on the floor, paralyzed. Although it was still alive, it was unable to attack a second time.

When he shifted his gaze towards his shoulder to check the bleeding—

"……So that's how it is. I finally see the trick behind this."

"Zessel……Your shoulder!"

Enne yelled hoarsely.

His left shoulder was turning to ash-grey stone. There was no pain or discomfort. But just like it wasn't his own arm, no matter how much strength he used, anything below his shoulder wouldn't move.

So this was the cause of the stone statues in the entrance hall.

"Think about it later! First, we need to get out of here! This research institute is dangerous!"

They ran back through the hallway they had walked down, but after a few seconds, the two of them froze in their steps.

……There shouldn’t have been anything back here……

Grey reptiles filled the hallway they had come from. On the walls were snakes identical to the large snake that had attacked him. From even the ceiling to the side walls were bodies of snakes slithering forward. At the very least, there were ten of them.

He recalled the mountains of ash in the hallway. Had they been hiding inside? But there was one thing he couldn’t understand. What was the reason behind going so far to prevent intruders from leaving?

If their purpose had been to prevent people from entering the research institute, then there would be no need to hide these Recited creatures. They should have acted threatening from the very beginning, in the entrance hall. Rather, it seemed like they had been inviting people inside the research institute—

“……I see.”

He gripped the shoulder of Enne, who remained standing.

“Zessel?”

The snakes blocked the exit and sealed off the path back. Naturally, there was only one path left for intruders.

That’s right. The rascal who created this was definitely urging them to go further into the research institute.

“Enne, we can escape inside!”

Giving Enne a push from behind, Zessel ran down the corridor.

Farther into the research institute.

Interval Play: It was Invited by the Cold Summer Wind

A cold wind mixed with the gentle breeze that was filled with heat and humidity. Even at this time in summer, the weather suddenly pulled this fickle prank. Exposing his body to the wind that cooled down his skin, Klaus Yung Gillshuvesher closed his eyes.

……Has it already been a year?

He could still clearly remember every word and sentence in the argument with his daughter a year ago.

'Why, why am I the only one who has to do such a thing?!'

Last year’s hot days and hot nights had been just like they were now.

—With great reverence and dignity, I carve out my name
O toga Wem millmo, HIr shoul da ora peg ilmeri ende zorm

'Other children are playing with their friends, so why is it that only I have to do this every single day—'

Ada Yung. From the time his daughter had been born, she was given an Exorcist Gil Spear. When she had become old enough to understand what was going on, she had begun training to be an Exorcist Gillshe.

The training of an Exorcist Gillshe. To say the least, the rigorous training was different from conventional methods. These drills began before the sun rose and had no end. Even when the trainee's muscles screamed, bones cried, and they couldn't even breathe, they still continued to swing the spear. When their mind was worn down and they had lost consciousness, then the day's training finally stopped.

The beginning of the one sent back (farewell)
Lor be se Gillisu feo olfey cori ende olte

'It's not that it's tough. Just……It's too pointless.'

She was the only daughter of the Yung family. In other words, she was the one who would eventually become Klaus's successor.

Including Klaus himself, the people around her had great expectations for her. Therefore, the training imposed on her had been suitably harsh. The young girl who hadn't even reached the age to go to school had gone through training that even a grown man couldn't endure. Of course she wouldn't be able to do it. From the very beginning, the training was meant for her to learn defeat.

Anyone would think it was impossible. Even Klaus had thought that his daughter would give up.

—However, his daughter had endured.

She hadn't just overcome the intense training, but she had learned the art of the spear unusually quickly. While only being a little over ten years old, her abilities exceeded everyone who Klaus could think of, except for himself.

Her talent surpassed even the word 'talent', but would be better compared to 'insanity'. So much so that even her own father had felt frightened.

It was frightening. But at the same time, it was his ultimate pride.

It was unmistakably her natural talent. Whenever Klaus was outside, he had become so engrossed in boasting about his daughter that he had been called a foolish parent. While his daughter trained, he had always watched over her from a place where she wouldn't notice him. Even now, he could still proclaim with pride just how much he loved his daughter.

A Master Exorcist. It was a title that could only be obtained after fulfilling certain conditions. Of all the Exorcists who had completed their training, most of them had been around thirty years old before receiving this title. When Klaus had earned it at twenty-four years old, he had been greatly praised by the people around him.

Ada Yung Gillshuvesher.

She was a unique, even abnormal girl who had been granted the title at only sixteen years old.

Until now, Klaus had known few people who he approved of, who were worthy of his respect. But his

daughter exceeded even that, making him feel an unbearable fear.

She was an Exorcist (Gillshe) with the noblest lineage. The best blood. She had received all of the skill and history of her predecessors, and surpassed them with the ultimate talent.

However—

'I've had enough of this boring life!'

That summer. That hot night.

She had burst into his room, yelling.

……No, perhaps he had felt a slight premonition long ago.

"Ada. Do you truly think this path is nothing but boring?"

He muttered his response on that day.

His daughter had been crying. He didn't know what she had been thinking of or crying about.

Did she feel angry or sad towards her father? Did she feel like she was suffering, or frustrated at being born into this family lineage?

'What about you, father? Have you never felt like that? Having it decided from the moment you were born that you would do this, and then repeating the same thing for your whole life until you die. Have you really never questioned it?'

Dreams and desires, cast everything away to a distant past (back)
ole shan ilis, peg loar, peg kei, Hir et univa sm hid

That path will no longer grant anything beyond a look back
Hir be qusi Gillisu xshao ele sm thes, neckt ele

"……I have."

Before, whenever he faced his daughter, he had always stubbornly said he hadn't.

But now, it was time to admit that it had been his clumsy lie.

"Anyone born into a family of Exorcists (Gillshe) will struggle with that question at least once. —I was also like that."

There was a large tree planted in the garden. Tied around its thick trunk was a long-standing target with several thousands, several tens of thousands of little holes in it. Each day, they would always just aim their spears at that target.

"But one day, I realized."

Just like how Reciters have <Songs of Praise> (Oratorios), a song of worship is passed down by Exorcists (Gillshe). The meaning behind the lyrics was concealed in the Serafeno Musical Language.

My path is nowhere else but here
Hir be qusi Gillisu xshao ele sm thes, neckt ele

It wasn't meant to be told to anyone. That path was the one each person chose for themselves.

'……Father, I don't understand.'

"It's not that you don't understand. You just haven't realized it yet."

'gil' means 'ahead' in the Serafeno Musical Language.

'ilis' means 'desire' in the Serafeno Musical Language.

It was the origin of the Gillshe's Exorcists' name. Why was it that her father still hadn't taught her something as fundamental as this?

Because he hoped that she would realize it for herself.

Protector who stands farther ahead than anyone else
——[gillisu]

For someone, this path will surely……

4th Play: Please Teach Me the Path of the Guarding Spear

Part 1

On the first floor of the branch school, not a soul could be seen in the lounge. Other than the occasional footsteps passing in the corridor, the lobby was quiet like a lake in midwinter.

……Well, it was class time at the moment, so it couldn't be helped.

At the far end of the lounge, with her elbows on a table and resting her chin in her hands, Ada gazed beyond the glass-paneled wall at the scenery outside.

"—I'm supposed to be doing self-study, but……"

She flipped through the textbook lying on the table and skimmed the contents written on the pages. But that lasted no more than a dozen seconds. Letting out an exhausted sigh, Ada put her head down on the table.

For her, the act of staring at a book on the table felt impossible. That's right. Moving her body around

outside was much more comfortable. Holding onto her Exorcist[Gil] Spear was much more—

"Ah, no, no!"

……Geez, what was she thinking?

She was no longer an Exorcist[Gillshe], but a student studying at a Recitation school.

That's right, she didn't need an Exorcist[Gil] Spear. …… Well, she shouldn't need it.

'But if that's so, why are you still practicing like this with the Exorcist[Gil] Spear?'

"……Yeah, I wonder why?"

Lying sprawled on the table, she turned only her gaze toward the lights on the ceiling.

The question that Neight asked her yesterday had left her at a loss for words.

She had practiced until the feeling of the Exorcist Gil Spear seeped into the marrow of her bones. She had also joined the spear-wielding club. She had thought again and again that she wanted to quit, but when she came to her senses, she always found herself swinging a spear.

If she was asked that question once again, how should she reply?

Feeling exhausted, she closed her eyes for a few minutes—

Suddenly, faint footsteps echoed through the lobby. In any case, it was probably just the school janitor. Arbitrarily deciding that, Ada closed her eyes once again.

However, those footsteps did not pass by, but instead stopped right behind her—

“Hey Ada, what’s wrong?”

Huh? This voice is…?

Hearing the familiar voice, Ada raised her head. In her field of vision that was still fuzzy with drowsiness, she saw a female classmate peering down at her.

“What about you, Kluele? It’s class time right now, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, that’s true. But I ended up doing some self-studying.”

Carrying her self-study textbook and a drink in a paper cup, Kluele sat down across from Ada. As she waited for Kluele to settle down, Ada opened her mouth.

“……Hey Kluele, I was curious about it before, but you get along well with Chibi-kun, don’t you?”

“By Chibi-kun, do you mean Neight?” Raising the paper cup to her lips, she tilted her neck.

“Yeah, yeah. I heard from Chibi-kun that you two spent the entire summer practicing Recitations together?”

“It wasn’t the entire summer, just when I had time,” Kluele replied casually with a nonchalant expression.

Just when I had time— Knowing Kluele, that meant the same as ‘during all of the free time I had’.

……You know, that’s what we call ‘entire’.

“Were you playing the role of an older sister?”

“It wasn’t like that. I just couldn’t leave him there by himself.”

“Well, he’s only thirteen years old. And he’s quite a hasty, scatterbrained person as well.”

Imagining Neight’s hurried manner, Ada let out a small wry smile. It still remained fresh in her memory how on the day Neight had transferred in, his Recitation in the lab had accidentally turned into black smoke.

“That’s true as well. But…….there’s various other reasons too.”

What exactly these various other reasons were, Kluele didn’t mention. But just by looking at her expression, Ada could tell that they weren’t simple matters.

“Well, Chibi-kun’s also a handful, isn’t he?”

"'Chibi-kun also'?" Her sharp-eared friend asked, repeating back a part of what she had just said.

"……Um, you see……"

Ada lowered her gaze slightly.

"Let's say for example that there was a student in the class other than Chibi-kun who was alone. If that were so , what would you do, Kluele?"

"……For example, who?" With her eyes reflecting the tense atmosphere, Kluele asked in a quiet voice.

"For example, people like me." But as soon as Ada finished saying those words……

"Ah, it's fine. That's not true," Kluele said lightheartedly, waving her hand.

"Eh? 'It's fine', meaning?"

"Honestly, I was wondering what you would say! The day when someone sees you depressed, the entire school will be in an uproar, you know. The student council will

hold a special meeting, the newspaper club will mobilize to gather information, and the mystery investigation club will also start investigating the origin of the uproar."

……Eh? Wa-Wait a second, that's too crue—

"In the first place, asking that sort of question isn't like you. You're usually using your strength to foolishly cause commotions and get teachers angry. And on top of that, aren't you 'Ada the Demon of Lateness'?"

"……Wh-Why you!"

Although her facial expression twitched, she somehow kept calm. Yes, she should be staying calm. She was calm . She definitely wasn't clenching her fists under the table.

"—But……"

Kluele deliberately changed her expression to one different from her teasing look before.

"If there really is something troubling you, I wish you' d talk to me about it. If it's just listening, I think I can do that for you."

……Consulting her? It would be good if she could do that, but……

Within her heart, Ada shook her head.

It was a problem she couldn't tell her parents or her teachers about. Telling her to consult someone about it was simple, but for the troubled person herself, she needed the utmost courage. If she could do something like consult with someone—

"'If I could do that, then I wouldn't be so troubled.' Ada, could it be that you were thinking something along those lines?" Without any prior notice, the girl sitting across from Ada bluntly declared.

Her voice sounded unusually strong, like she had absolute confidence in her words.

"…….Why do you think so?"

"Because I was like that just a little while ago." Ada's classmate solemnly informed her.

"……You were?"

"Yeah. Even though I seem like this right now, I've been feeling lost for quite a while. You might think it's strange of me to say this, but there were times when I felt so lost that it was a nuisance just to come to school."

She didn't act like that at all in the classroom, but was instead always a bright and helpful girl. Other than that cheerful image, Ada couldn't imagine Kluele any other way. ……But surely she wasn't lying. If she was, there was no way that she could have read Ada's feelings.

"But because of that, I think I can empathize with others who feel the same way." Kluele calmly placed her hand on her chest.

"That's why it's fine for you to come and tell me if something happens. It doesn't need to be a formal consultation. We can even discuss it casually in the dorms. If you're fine with telling me, I'll be there for you anytime. After all, we're friends, right?" Resting her chin in her hands, Kluele smiled.

"……"

"Huh? Ada? What's wrong?"

"……It's nothing."

Ada nonchalantly turned around so that her back faced the girl who was staring at her.

Kluele would listen to what she had to say. Naturally, Ada was grateful to hear those words. But— Although their worries were different, there was someone who had felt lost like her, but continued to work hard despite that. Knowing that made her feel very happy.

“Well, I should thank you for that. But don’t worry about what I said, it was just an example.”

Quietly standing up, Ada stretched a few times.

“Ah, by the way, why are you resting here at a time like this?”

“Apparently Enne-sensei, who’s in charge of my lectures, isn’t feeling well so the lectures for students of her specialty are canceled.”

That morning, it had been suddenly announced that the lectures were cancelled. Because Ada had nothing to do in her room, she ended up strolling around aimlessly in the school building. But she had gotten bored of that as well, so she took a rest in the lounge.

"Ah, it's the same situation I'm in. My teacher has a cold."

"Kluele's specialty is in [Keinez(Red)], right? Who's your teacher?"

"He's named Zessel. Apparently he usually teaches students in higher grades."

……Zessel-sensei?

After hearing Kluele's answer, in her mind, Ada frowned.

How strange. If she were to believe what Enne-sensei had said, Enne and Zessel had joined the summer camp in the place of two teachers who weren't feeling well. But now they had gotten sick as well?

"Hey Kluele, your [Keinez(Red)] lecture yesterday was taught by Zessel-sensei, right?"

"Yeah. He seemed fine yesterday though."

He had taught a lecture like usual yesterday. It had been the same with Enne. And if Ada remembered

correctly— there was something in common about the two of them yesterday.

"After class yesterday, when I walked past Zessel-sensei, I remember he was wearing formal clothing. But on the first day, he wore a casual T-shirt on the train."

"Now that you mention it, that's true. Other students have also been saying how unusual it is."

Although Tremia Academy provided teachers with a blazer to wear, what the teachers usually wore everyday was up to their own discretion. For Zessel, he seemed to be the type who liked light and convenient clothing.

But oddly, he had been wearing formal clothing. And moreover, at this time in midsummer?

Some general ideas that Ada could think of were— He could be attending an important meeting, or maybe someone was coming to visit the branch school, or conversely, he could be going to visit someone important .

First of all, attending an important meeting here was hard to imagine. This was a branch school instead of the

main campus, and there couldn't possibly be an important meeting in the middle of summer holidays.

Also, there was no need for visitors to come specifically to the branch school. If they had a really important task, then they should go to the main campus instead. Contrarily, if there was something minor to attend to, then sending something like a letter should be fine. Realistically, there was no chance that an important guest would come during summer vacation, to a branch school in the middle of summer camp.

Therefore, by process of elimination, the only remaining option was that Zessel had gone to visit someone important.

……Ada thought back to Enne's lecture yesterday.

Enne had given the students a practice test and allowed the students who finished to leave immediately afterward. Actually, other than Ada, all of the other students should have left the classroom before class had been officially over.

—Was there a reason why Enne had ended class early?

Furthermore, that time, Ada had passed by Zessel in the hallway. She had passed by him after leaving Enne. In other words, Zessel had been walking in the direction of the classroom that Enne taught in. Which means after that, did Zessel and Enne have plans to go somewhere together?

Go somewhere…… And now, for some reason, the two of them were in a situation in which they couldn't teach class.

Supporting this theory was the class that had been cancelled abnormally. If the teachers had known beforehand about the cancelled lecture, they should have assigned someone to be substitute. In short, there was a high possibility that this cancelled lecture was unexpected.

"Hey Ada, don't you feel like it's a little unnatural?"

Holding her self-study textbook in one hand, Ada's classmate stood up. Since Kluele seemed to feel the same doubts, should she tell her what she was thinking?

"Yeah, it feels strange. Kluele, what will you do? Do you have time?"

"I do. The lecture's cancelled, and I'll just get more confused if I stay here like this, so I'll go along with you."

The two of them made eye contact, then turned around so their backs faced each other. What they needed to check was — whether the two teachers who weren't feeling well were actually in the branch school right now.

The two were probably not inside the school.

If that was the case, then for what reason did they suddenly leave?

"Kluele, can you go check the nurse's office on the first floor? I'll take a peek in the second floor staff room."

***

There was a knock on the door of the small classroom.

Neight looked up from the blank exam sheet he had been working on. After opening the door, he saw a tall girl with black hair.

"Hey, Neighty. What are you doing alone in this classroom?"

"Ah, Serges-san. Good morning."

Serges held some paper and writing utensils in both hands. In the hallway behind her, for some reason, a few dozen students were moving around as a group.

"Are you going somewhere?"

"Yeah. Everyone specializing in [Surisuz(Yellow)] is gathering at the beach. The teacher's going to show us a demonstration. After that, it'll be free time."

"A demonstration? Sounds fun."

No, just watching will make us sleepy—After saying those words disinterestedly, the girl shrugged.

"Neighty, if you're interested, do you want to secretly come along?"

"……I still haven't finished a history class yet. I'm taking it while there's time for summer supplementary lessons, and Kate-sensei has been teaching me the whole time."

"Oh? So then, where's the essential Kate-sensei?"

Looking around the classroom restlessly, Serges tilted her head.

"Apparently she had something urgent to do this morning. She said, 'For this morning, do the quiz from the section you learned yesterday,' and then left."

"Oh, I see. Well then, good luck, kid!"

After saying that, Serges swiftly turned around, making Neight think she would exit through the closed door.

"Ah, that's right."

With her back facing Neight, Serges suddenly said.

"Neighty, I told you before to go take a look on the roof… How did it go? Did you meet her?"

"Yes. Ada-san, right?"

"What did you think?"

Hearing the complicated question, Neight looked up at the ceiling.

"What did I think…… 'It's amazing'. She's also in the spear-wielding club, and…… um, an Exorcist, was it? She seemed to have had a lot of practice."

"I see. So that's how you think of it?"

Serges nodded. The action seemed like she was agreeing with him.

—Practice…… It doesn't seem to be…… that simple—

"Eh?"

The words of the girl with her back facing Neight were said in such a quiet voice that Neight couldn't hear the end of her sentence.

"U-Um."

Before Neight had time to ask, Serges turned around to face him.

"I share a dorm room with her, so I've heard various things. ……Neighty, don't say anything to other people about her!"

"A-Alright."

He didn't ask why, because the girl's tone of voice sounded extremely sad.

"Well, until she can say it aloud herself."

"Until Ada-san can?"

"Yeah. She's really conscious about being 'different'."

—Different? What did that mean?

Not noticing Neight's bewilderment, Serges leaned against the door. Her eyes that seemed to have turned weak looked beyond the window of the classroom, gazing at a place even farther away.

"She's such an idiot, wondering if she'll become distant from her friends because she's *that*, and if she'll be hated one day. She can't help but always worry about it…… Even though there's no way that would happen."

"U-Um. What do you mean? I don't hate Ada-san at all ."

"No, she just selfishly convinced herself of that. It's not something Neighty should worry about. ……But hey, Neighty, just remember this."

Once again, Serges turned around so that her back faced Neight.

"Although it was because of different reasons than Neighty, a long time ago, she was alone as well."

***

In the communications room of the branch school, facing the radio equipment, Kate tried her best to keep calm.

"Has there really been no message from…… Zessel-sensei or Enne-sensei?"

"The main campus hasn't received any."

The person she was talking to bluntly stated the truth.

"Kate, can you confirm one more time? Zessel and Enne left for Kelberk Research Institute after one o'clock yesterday. After that, their regularly-sent reports stopped ."

"—That's right."

The clock on the wall showed that it was currently nine-thirty.

Twenty hours had already passed since the last time that the two had been seen inside the branch school.

"They are out right now on a special task for the headmaster, which means I can't personally give you instructions on what to do…… How are the students doing?"

"We're treating it as cancelled lectures. All of the lectures have been cancelled, so the students are probably also feeling suspicious, but all of the other lectures are going as planned."

For a few seconds, there was silence from the other side of the connection.

Mirror Kei Endurnce.

He had become a teacher at the same time as Zessel and Enne, and was also a knowledgeable person in Tremia Academy's information department.

"You should also have classes this afternoon, right?"

"Yeah. Starting this afternoon, all of the teachers have lectures planned."

Right now, she had her hands empty. But once afternoon came, there wouldn't be a teacher who could go support the two who they had lost contact with. In the beginning, they should have organized an emergency support team.

"……Even without your saying, their disappearance is suspicious."

The quiet voice coming from the wireless radio agreed. It was natural to think that something had happened in Kelberk Research Institute.

"I'll—"

"You can't!"

I'll go look around. But before Kate could finish speaking, she was cut off.

"Those two should have been cautious when going inside. Even though they were completely prepared, they ended up getting involved in some unknown situation. It 's too dangerous for you to go alone. You should go in a team of at least two, no three people."

That….. I know that.

She was still a new teacher. She understood more than anyone that she lacked experience and knowledge.

"If we still don't hear from them until seven tonight, then I'll head over on the eight o'clock train. Wait until then. Have faith in your colleagues."

Mirror cut off his side of the call.

Kate glanced at the clock hanging on the wall. There were less than ten hours left until seven o'clock at night.

But…… She couldn't wait until then.

If it was just a temporary accident, then Enne and Zessel should be able to call out something to deliver a

message. But if they were under circumstances where they couldn't do even that, then just how serious was their situation?

—Sure enough, she should go take a look around the research institute.

Kate headed towards the lockers assigned to teachers and took out manmade gemstones and catalysts that she had created herself. She hid the catalysts that she was most accustomed to using in the pockets sewed into the lining of her shirt.

"……You two, please be safe."

The teacher wearing a pale green suit left the communications room and walked down the hallway with quick steps. The sound of her footsteps overlapped with Ada's, who was quietly following from behind.

—Kate-sensei, where are you going?

There was no hesitation in the teacher's gait. She descended from the second floor to the first, then walked through the entrance hall and exited the school building.

……Oh no.

The teacher's movements were faster than Ada expected, making Ada scowl.

When she had been eavesdropping with her ear pressed to the room's outside wall, she could barely hear Kate's voice talking. No, the teacher had purposely lowered her voice so that nobody outside could hear.

The one thing Ada knew was that her homeroom teacher was heading somewhere.

Ada peered out from the door that was open a small crack. Kate seemed to have been in such a rush that she left her locker open. It seemed like she had been carefully choosing what catalysts to take out.

—It was a bit too strange.

The anxious look on the teacher's face was clearly different from her usual expression.

Well then, what to do?

Right now, there was no time to contact Kluele. Ada had thought that the teachers would start making their

move this afternoon, but they had already started right now.

It couldn't be helped, Ada would just have to trail her alone—— Huh?

Feeling a presence behind her, Ada suddenly turned around.

"Eh, Ada-san?"

There stood a boy with young-looking features and deep night-colored hair.

Part 2

In the research institute, holding her breath in the small, dimly-lit room, Enne searched for the presence of living things on the other side of the door.

She pressed her ear to the door for a few seconds— There was no sound of the creatures coming closer. Ten seconds…… twenty seconds. She listened carefully for over a minute, but she heard no change in the silence outside.

……Whew. Enne finally let out the breath she had been holding.

“For now, it seems safe here.”

They were in a small room beside the straight hallway. The room contained a few sofas and an elliptical table, so it was probably a lounge.

“How’s your arm?”

Enne turned around to look at Zessel, who was sitting on a sofa. With a bitter smile, Zessel used his movable right arm to tap his left arm, which had turned to stone.

“Well, it doesn’t feel painful or uncomfortable. It’s just that no matter how much I try, I can’t move anything below my shoulder.”

The grey snakes and lizards were hiding in the entrance hall. Also, the majority of the researchers who had been turned to stone were around there. They had definitely been attacked by the snakes and lizards.

“It probably wasn’t just a single person who called out all of those Recited creatures.”

Turning his gaze to the table, Zessel stayed silent. That was also something he had been wondering about.

—But right now, there was something more important to think about.

“For now, we need to think of a way to cure your left arm.”

Right now, it was better to think of those things as Recited creatures, like Zessel had said.

What they had discovered so far was that all of those creatures were grey, without exception. Also, there were large amounts of ash everywhere in the research institute , as well as creatures with grey skin. It was hard to think that those two facts were not connected.

Snakes and lizards were hiding inside those piles of ash. But instead of being just a hiding place, could the ash be the catalyst that was used to call out the Recited creatures?

“Using ash left over from fires as a catalyst? I’ve never heard of such a Recitation.”

"We don't have enough evidence yet, so it's difficult to understand. For now, let's assume those things are Recited creatures. If we think of it like that, then we can make some sense of this situation. Also, there's an additional benefit to thinking like that."

"An additional benefit?"

Zessel repeated like a parrot. Enne stared down at his left arm.

"If that was caused by a Recited creature, then there's a way to cure both your arm and the researchers who were turned to stone. We just need to take away the Recitation effect that's turning your arm to stone."

"—A Reverse Song?"

Among Recited creatures, there were some species that had poisonous fangs. The poison didn't disappear when the Recited creature disappeared, but had to be treated in a way that sent back the poison itself. It would be worth trying the same method on Zessel's arm.

"I wish we had a specialist Exorcist (Gillshe) here. If I were to do it, it would probably take a lot of time."

From a pocket in her suit, Enne took out a flask containing a liquid catalyst.

"There's no point being impatient in a situation like this. Take your time."

Zessel said philosophically and casually to his childhood friend.

***

"……Where's Kate-sensei going?"

In a quiet voice, Neight asked Ada, who was walking in front of him.

"We'll know if we follow her."

The girl shrugged her tanned shoulders.

Holding the test papers that he had filled out, Neight had been in the middle of heading to the staff room.

'Chibi-kun. Come with me, just in case.'

Ada had whispered as she continued to follow Kate. Just how much farther would they walk? Ten minutes, or perhaps a few dozen minutes? The tension and weariness of not being used to tailing someone numbed her sense of time.

The teacher headed down the one-way road going away from the beach. The road was sparsely bordered by thin trees, so there were only a few places to hide as Ada and Neight tailed her. Furthermore, the ground was sandy. Sand flew up with each step, making a small noise.

That should have been the case, but— The only footsteps Neight heard were the teacher's and his own.

The footsteps of the girl who walked slightly ahead of him were so quiet that they were nearly silent.

Ada walked in a silent way that left even no footprints on the sand. Neight remembered when she had been practicing with her spear on the beach. That time, she also hadn't left any footprints in the sand.

……Was this also part of an Exorcist(Gillshe)'s training?

Exorcists (Gillshe)— Those who sent back Recitations. They were people who completely contrasted Reciters.

'Neight…… What do you think a Recitation is?'

That was what his bedridden mother had said.

'These things called Recitations are used to call out yourself. That's what I think. A true Reciter is one who gives form to his heart and calls it out.'

If he were to believe his mother's words from that day — If a Recitation was the same as calling out one's heart, then why was there a need to send it back?

……Mother, perhaps I still don't understand it.

He had decided that he wanted to believe in the words of nobody but his mother. However, the fact that there were people giving it their all to live their lives as Exorcists (Gillshe) was an undeniable truth.

"Ah, um, Ada-san."

"Hm? What is it, Chibi-kun?"

"N……No, I'm sorry. It's nothing."

Letting the lump stay in his chest, Neight closed his mouth.

He didn't understand. Hey, Ada-san, do you feel like that too?

Neither Reciters nor Exorcists (Gillshe) were unneeded. Was Ada suffering like this because she was trapped, unable to move between those songs and spears?

The girl stayed silent. Neight moved a single step closer to her, shortening the distance between them.

He believed that he could shorten the distance between her heart and his, if only by a little bit.

—Kelberk Research Institute, Fidellia branch.

Farther down the road, a signpost engraved with those words came into view.

***

On the surface of his arm that had turned into grey stone, a crack appeared. A fissure. It extended from his fingertip to his elbow—

"Hey, this—"

Wasn't this bad? Before her colleague finished speaking, Enne placed a hand over his mouth.

"It's fine. Don't move."

While saying that, her gaze was focused on his shoulder.

……Alright. A pale white light leaked out from within the crack. Like steam rising up, the particles of light slowly floated towards the ceiling. It was evidence of the Reverse Song's effects.

Along with the particles of white light, pieces of grey rock peeled off Zessel's arm. And then……

"So, how do you feel?"

Breathing a sigh of relief as the color returned to Zessel ’s left shoulder, Enne wiped away the sweat that had formed on her forehead.

As Enne spoke, Zessel put some strength into his left shoulder.

“……I can move it. It doesn’t feel painful or uncomfortable.”

His arm looked the same as it did before it had been turned to stone. Honestly speaking, both of them had been prepared for some aftereffects to remain after the healing process.

“This is a bit of luck in all our misfortune, huh?”

“Hey, where’s my thanks?”

His childhood friend showed an oddly innocent smile.

“When we get back, I’ll buy you a new swimming ring .”

“I’ll be expecting it!”

After loosening up for a second, Enne's solemn expression quickly returned.

"There's one thing we know about it so far. I tried [Yellow Surisuz] and [Green Beorc], but those two Reverse Songs had barely any effect. The one that worked was [White Arzus]. If I had to categorize this Recitation, I'd say it's closest to [White Arzus]."

"……What do you mean by 'closest'?"

[White Arzus] certainly had an effect on it. But in reality, it was somewhat different from the [White Arzus] that Enne was familiar with. A subdivision of [White Arzus]…… No, a Recitation derived from it and then altered?

Academically, within the five colors, it would be classified as a White Recitation because it was unmistakably that Reverse Song which had worked. But it would be risky to classify it completely under White.

"For convenience, perhaps we should call it [Grey Isa] for now."

That's right. In other words, Grey Recitations.

It wasn't a Recitation just called out grey things, but also turned the opponent into grey stone. By making that assumption, most of the unusual circumstances could be explained.

"Grey Recitations? Can we acknowledge such a color so hastily?"

Enne's colleague spoke with a doubtful expression on his face. Enne understood his disbelief. Altogether, there were only five colors of Recitations that existed in the world. There were no exceptions. Enne had believed that also.

"But we know of an exception to the five colors."

The exception was called Night Color Recitations.

They had seen with their own eyes the Night Color's singer, its song, and its True Spirit.

"……Well, I guess that's true."

With a discouraged expression, Zessel quieted down.

"If you don't want to think of Night Color Recitations as an abnormality, then let's consider Grey Recitations as

an abnormal variation of [White Arzus]. And moreover, an astoundingly aggressive variation.”

There should have been only a few creatures in White Recitations that were offensive in nature, yet Grey Recitations was an aggressive color that managed to defeat the whole research institute by itself.

“You seem disgusted.”

“Because this isn’t the true way that a Recitation should be used.”

If this was a subdivision of [White Arzus], then all the more reason so.

That horrible Recitation shouldn’t be used like that, for no matter what reason.

“Hey, does that mean you can also cure all of the researchers?”

……Although Enne wanted to do that, it would take too much time and effort.

“We don’t have any time to spare right now.”

They hadn't made contact with the school for quite a long time. The branch school and possibly the main campus were probably in a state of confusion about the situation right now. They needed hurry and contact the schools, but a large number of Recited creatures were currently still blocking their escape route.

"For now, let's head farther into the research institute. This is a large institution, so there should be one or two emergency escape passages. Or we might be able to find an exit not blocked by a group of those annoying things."

Zessel rotated his left arm around to return some body heat back into it. His colleague stood up from her place on the sofa.

"I'm not too eager to do this, but we have no other choice."

With a tired expression, Zessel nodded. Placing her hand on his shoulder, Enne nodded back. This was the only thing they could think of doing right now.

—Let's hurry. Our strength is reaching its limit.

Part 3

Kelberk Research Institute? What business did Kate-sensei have in there?

Looking at the unfamiliar words carved on the signpost, Ada frowned inwardly. Ahead, she could clearly see some sort of large institution. That was probably the research institute.

Chibi-kun, be careful. Just when Ada mouthed those words, Neight tripped on a rock protruding from the road.

Ah…… The boy let out a quiet shriek.

"Who's there?"

Kate, who had been walking in front of them, suddenly turned around.

Oh no, this is bad. Ada quickly hid behind the nearest tree.

"I-I'm sorr— Ugh!"

No, be quiet! Ada forcefully covered the mouth of Neight, who had been about to apologize loudly. But it was too late. The teacher ahead of them raised her voice.

“Over there, who are you?!”

Did she have a feeling that she was being followed? The teacher’s words weren’t a question, but had the tone of a command.

“A-Ada-san. What should we do?”

……What should we do, huh?

“I’ll wait five seconds. You’d better show yourself by then!”

Hey Sensei, if you say it like that, who would—

“If you don’t come out, I’ll use a Recitation to pelt every tree in this region with large pieces of hail—”

“Wha…… W-Wait, time-out! Sensei, don’t act hastily! Look, it’s only me. Sensei’s cute, cute student!”

There was silence.

After a moment, the teacher spoke in a tone of disbelief.

“If you’re the true Ada, then I think you should show yourself to your teacher right away!”

‘If you’re the true Ada’…… So she already knew who it was.

Letting out a loud sigh, Ada stepped forward from behind the tree and onto the road.

“Okay, I get it. We lose! Hey Chibi-kun, you come out too!”

“A-Agh! ……Ada-san, it’s not nice to suddenly kick me!”

“Neight-kun as well? Just what are you guys doing?”

Their homeroom teacher gazed at them with a look filled with half amazement, half surprise.

“No, Sensei, it’s just a chance meeting. We were just taking a stroll.”

Ada tried as hard as she could to show a deceptive smile.

“U-Um. Ada-san was curious about where Kate-sensei was going, so—”

“Ah, Chibi-kun, you traitor!”

Losing to pressure, the innocent boy beside her quickly spat out the truth.

“Hmm. Ada will always tell me the truth, right, Ada?”

“U……Um…… How should I put it……”

—Sensei, you look too scary holding a catalyst and threatening us.

***

“So this is the research lab?”

Glancing around the room, Zessel crossed his arms.

It was a gigantic research laboratory. All kinds of lab equipment could be seen around the room. There was also a translucent tank filled with a chemical solution. One thing they all had in common was that each single thing was damaged in some way. Furthermore, there were also the figures of a few staff members who had been turned to stone.

Staff members who had turned to stone could be seen everywhere around the research institute. In other words , this situation had affected the entire institute.

Had it been a dispute between staff members? Or perhaps—

"So it was an attack by a person we don't know about. "

Enne muttered in a quiet voice. Without blinking, she gazed steadily at the words written before them.

Lastihyt ; One who lingers at the throne of the defeated
Lastihyt ; miquvy Wer shela –c-nixer arsa

A white limestone pillar towered in the center of the

main room. On the monument that was built with expensive stone, engraved in scarlet paint were distorted words in the Serafeno Musical Language.

"Lastihyt. Is that something's name?"

—No, this is……

"A person's name."

Zessel quickly ran closer to the stone monument and brushed his fingers over the stone like he was rubbing it. A few flakes of paint peeled off. No, it was something that had been used to replace paint.

It was dark red. So it's blood, huh?

"Two years ago…… No, it was earlier than that, more like three years ago. Xins was searching for someone with this name."

"Xins was?"

Narrowing her eyes, his colleague turned to look at him with an uncomprehending face.

"I never heard the reason why. In fact, I didn't know anything about it other than this mysterious name."

He looked away from the words written in blood that was turning darker.

The hallway continued farther inside the institute. According to a floor plan taped on the wall, beyond here seemed to be innermost, most spacious room.

"Let's hurry. We shouldn't linger for too long in here."

Leading the way, Enne walked quietly down the hallway. Zessel, who had been about to follow after her, suddenly stopped his footsteps.

A mechanical noise echoed several times throughout the laboratory.

"The door buzzer?"

Someone was coming. It was probably a teacher from Tremia who had come looking for them.

"……That's not good."

Hiding in the entrance hall with baited breath were dangerous Recited creatures.

***

"—So because you were suspicious as to where I was going, you followed me."

After hearing Ada's confession, Kate exaggeratedly covered her eyes.

"But I was curious! Both Enne-sensei and Zessel-sensei aren't inside the branch school, so I thought you were going to look for them."

Ada lied confidently. ……Honestly…… Whether it was a lucky guess or a good sense of perception, she was sharp only during troublesome times like this.

"So, what's so special about this place, Sensei?"

Ada pointed casually at the Kelberk Research Institute ahead of them.

"It's the research institute of someone I know."

"Yeah, I already know that much. What I'm curious about is the reason why Enne-sensei and Zessel-sensei aren't at school. I was thinking that Kate-sensei coming to a place like this must mean this place is connected somehow."

Whether there was a special reason— Ada spoke in an indirect manner that feigned ignorance.

"Honestly, even I'm not too sure about that."

Kate turned her gaze back to the road ahead. The institution surrounded by dark grey walls was clearly visible.

Kelberk Research Insititute, Fidellia branch. It was the research institute that had manufactured the <Egg> and brought it to Tremia Academy.

Zessel and Enne should be here. It would be dangerous for Kate to allow the students to accompany her any farther. But…… Since they had already come here, what should she do? Even if she told them to go back right now, she had the feeling that they wouldn't leave.

Also, there was one more thing. In case the worst situation occurred inside the facility, there was a possibility that someone would be needed to relay the situation back to the branch school.

"……Promise me one thing, you two. When I tell you to leave, no matter what happens, you must follow my instructions."

Both students nodded. After confirming that, Kate stepped onto the property of the research institute.

"Um, is it okay for us to just enter like that?"

"The institute is affiliated with Tremia. Tremia's teachers and Kelberk's research staff are allowed to come and go freely in both facilities."

……But even so, what was with the silence?

Not a single person could be seen around the institution. The unnatural silence made the three of them feel like their ears hurt.

—Were Zessel and Enne really in there?

Kate pushed the buzzer by the institution's front door. Through the door, she could hear the sound of the buzzer echoing inside.

"……Is nobody there?"

"That's kind of hard to imagine."

As if responding to Neight's doubt, Kate pushed the buzzer once again.

A few seconds. A few dozen seconds. There was no response from inside. In fact, they couldn't even hear the sound of staff members talking inside the research institution.

"Hey Sensei……"

Ada continued speaking while peering at the door's keyhole.

"The door seems to be unlocked."

Placing her hand on the door handle, she twisted the handle and pushed. With a creaking noise and a small puff of dust, the door moved.

"Just like that."

Kate let out the breath she had been holding. Although she sighed at losing her last chance to tell the two students to go back to school, another part of her felt differently. Was it determination? Or maybe anxiety?

"I'll open it."

Those words weren't directed at the two people behind her, but were meant for Kate herself.

Slowly, with a screeching sound like things rubbing together, the door opened. The three of them stepped into the dim entrance hall.

A strange scene lay ahead of them.

"……What are these?"

Lined up in the entrance lobby were about a dozen oddly-shaped stone statutes. Her face distorted with astonishment, Kate walked forward. Stone statues. And not just one or two. What all of the statues had in common was that they all wore some sort of pendant around their neck.

No, that wasn't it. Those were the nameplates worn by the staff of the research institute. Why were these statues wearing the staff's equipment? It was like——No way.

The chilling thought that crossed Kate's mind made goosebumps rise on her back.

"You two, stay away from the statues!"

"Eh?"

"Sensei, what's wrong?"

Ada, who had just been about to touch a stone statue, and Neight, who was walking down the hallway leading out of the left side of the entrance lobby, spoke simultaneously.

"It's dangerous here, so return to the school right away ! Neight, come back here!"

Although he had a doubtful expression on his face, Neight jogged towards Kate.

But as if it intended to block him……

Something grey fell down from the ceiling. It was something long and thin that wriggled back and forth. In front of the boy, it reared its head—

“A snake?!”

The boy’s footsteps stopped in front of the two-meter-long grey snake. Why was such a thing in this institution? No, this wasn’t the time to wonder about that .

“Sensei!”

From behind Kate came Ada’s shriek.

“I know! Neight-kun, step back!”

The snake eyed the boy, about to attack. Would she make it in time? From her suit pocket, Kate took out a manmade sapphire. A blue Recitation light shone from the catalyst she held in her hand.

But before she could finish her Recitation……

“No! Sensei, behind you!”

The girl behind her let out a scream even louder than her shriek before.

……Eh?

Kate felt a slight pain coming from her legs. At the same time, both of her legs became unable to move, as if they had turned to stone.

Only the one who stood farthest in the back— Only the one who stood closest to the exit, Ada, could completely understand what had just happened.

—The mysterious grey creature that had fallen from the ceiling was a single, large grey snake.

Neight and Kate's attention had naturally been drawn to that one snake. No, Ada had been like that as well. Her gaze had been focused on that one snake. But right now, there wasn't just one grey creature.

Ada heard the sound of something crawling on the ground. That sound came from beside the teacher's feet.

……Eh?

Large amounts of ash were piled up on the floor of the research institute. Those had moved. Or more accurately, the things hiding underneath them had moved.

Lizards?

These lizards had sharp claws and limbs that were longer and thinner than those of the lizards she normally saw. Moreover, it wasn't just a single creature.

Two, no, three? With clearly hostile looks in their eyes, the grey creatures crept up beside the teacher's feet.

Kate-sensei was— No, she was too focused on the large snake.

"Sensei!"

"I know! Neight-kun, step back!"

The teacher responded, holding a catalyst and focusing her gaze on the large snake.

No! That snake is just a decoy! The true danger is—

Ada regretted not bringing her Exorcist Gil Spear, but quickly dispelled that thought.

No, she wasn't an Gillshe Exorcist. Right now, she was a student studying to become a Reciter, so she should use some sort of Recitation. But……

……But, what should she call out?

Thinking about her arsenal of Recitations, Ada was speechless. She specialized in White Recitations, which contained few offensive creatures. But that didn't mean none at all. However, none of the offensive creatures was within her power to call out.

……She couldn't do anything with her Recitations.

"No! Sensei, behind you!"

All she could do was shout at her teacher. The teacher hastily turned around, but Ada's warning was too late. In the blind spot beneath Kate's feet, a lizard brandished its claws, aiming for her ankles.

The instant those claws struck Kate's feet, the teacher's feet changed from how they looked before.

Without even the faint sound of dust floating in the air , Kate's feet instantly turned grey and froze in place.

“Kate-sense—”

But.

Before the situation turned like this, the teacher had probably foreseen the chance of being turned to stone. She didn’t seem to be surprised that her feet had been deprived of their ability to move.

"Don't come this way!"

Kate immediately stretched out a hand in Ada's direction. In her other hand, the gemstone catalyst emitted a radiance that lit up the dark entrance hall.

——[Blue Song Ruguz]——

The teacher threw the catalyst at the floor. Instantly, from that spot on the ground, a large sheet of ice rose up in the entrance hall. It separated her from the group of grey creatures. Ada was fine, but Kate had also separated the petite Neight on the side with the creatures.

"S-Sense—"

"Ada, go report this to the teachers at school! Hurry!"

"B-But!"

"I'll do something about Neight-kun. While the wall of ice is up, those creatures shouldn't be able to chase you. Take this chance and distance yourself from this research institution!"

But there was no way that Ada would be persuaded by such a plan.

—Couldn't she do something?

Was that truly the right thing to do? She couldn't even be sure that it was the best option, but pressured by the teacher's desperate manner, she ran away.

"Sensei, Chibi-kun! ……I'm sorry!"

Ada ran through the entranceway and fled outside. Was it a trick of the wind, or had it been planned by the teacher? The instant after she ran outside, the door that had been open now slammed shut. She couldn't see the situation inside anymore and couldn't hear any screams or other sounds.

"I'm sorry…… I'm sorry…… I……"

—I'm an idiot.

I'm a hopeless idiot.

The girl fled through the entranceway. The safety of one

student had been secured for now, making Kate feel at ease. Only one more student remained.

Turning to face the remaining student, Kate yelled loudly.

"Neight-kun, head down that hallway!"

The boy who was confronting the huge snake hurriedly raised his head.

"But Sensei…!"

"I'm—"

I'm fine. I'll be safe. I'll definitely follow behind you. Kate could only think of those clumsy words. Those words of consolation definitely wouldn't be able to urge the boy forward.

Therefore, instead of nodding, Kate took out a lidded flask from her pocket.

"Neight-kun."

At the very least, she could show him a smile. He was someone who aspired to be a Reciter and she was his teacher.

"……I'm sorry I was such an unreliable teacher."

Once again, Kate threw the catalyst at the floor. The drops of liquid sparkled as they scattered over the floor and turned into a blue Recital Gate. A wall of ice that reached as high as the ceiling— It separated the boy from the area where the large snakes were gathered.

With this, he should also be safe for now. But in return , all of the grey creatures' gazes turned towards her. …… That was fine. She was……fine with this.

"Kate-sensei!"

"Run toward the inside of the institute. I don't know when the help that Ada went to ask for will come, so stay quietly hidden until then!"

"But—"

"……I'm truly sorry for being so unreliable."

She wanted to protect her student, but it was all she could do right now to become bait.

Like I thought, I'm still…… not qualified to be called a teacher.

***

……It happened again.

Her own powerlessness made Ada purse her lips.

The scenery constantly streamed by. How long had she been running for at a full sprint? The lack of oxygen gave her a headache. Her heart felt painful and her lungs were screaming. But even so, she continued to run.

Right now, the only thing she could do was run.

—Once again, she didn't do anything. She only ran away.

During the school's recital contest, when the chimeras had attacked, she had run away.

Gillshe

She wanted to be a Reciter and not a Exorcist, but she had always been scared of that part of herself. ……No, she had been pretending to be scared.

As a Reciter, she couldn't do anything. If she had been an Exorcist Gillshe at that time and swung her spear— At least she wouldn't be the one being protected. She should have been protecting them.

But she had wanted to try living as a Reciter. As a result, her friends had gotten seriously injured.

'For Chibi-kun, it's because of that, right? You want to become a Reciter because you want to complete the Recitation that your mother left you.'

'……Chibi-kun might get angry, but I can't do something like that.'

'For just a little while, I wanted to try going down a path other than what my heritage decided for me. The truth is, my mother has qualifications as a Reciter, so I was interested in Recitation schools ever since I was young.'

But if that's true, then why was she practicing with the Exorcist Gil Spear even now?

'……Because I don't want to regret it.'

During the recital contest, she had felt a sense of powerlessness. This time, she didn't want to have the same regrets.

She didn't want to have that dream anymore.

Therefore, even now, she hadn't discarded her Exorcist Gil Spear.

—But now, she was……

She had left behind both Kate-sensei and that young boy, then ran away by herself.

……Dad— I—

I…… What should I do?!

***

“Hurry, Enne!”

Zessel ran at full speed down the dim hallway.

The light fairy’s radiance lit the path ahead of him.

They had heard the sound a few minutes ago. If a teacher from Tremia had come to this institution looking for them, then that teacher should have naturally stepped into the entrance hall.

……But, it’s strange.

They should already be getting close to the entranceway so they were prepared for an attack by the grey Recited creatures. However, they hadn’t seen even one yet.

Leaving behind the whirlpool of doubt in his mind, Zessel turned the last corner that led to the entrance hall.

“—!”

The first thing he noticed was a gigantic wall of ice that stretched up to the ceiling. Beside that were countless lumps of ice scattered and rolling around. Trapped in those blocks of ice were the familiar grey Recited creatures.

And mingled in with the blocks of ice was— The figure of a person lying on the floor, completely still.

The person wore a familiar suit that Zessel had seen many times around the campus.

"Kate!"

While thinking of the worst case scenario, which sent chills up his spine, Zessel ran to his colleague's side.

He quickly lifted her up. Placing a hand on her shoulder, Zessel felt not the material of the suit, but the feeling of stone.

"……Ah……"

With her eyes closed, Kate let out a small sigh. The fact that her shoulders, back, legs, and half of her body had already turned to stone made Zessel extremely concerned.

“Enne, hurry!”

“I’m already doing it!”

Particles of light rose up from the large area from Kate’s shoulders to her back. Color faintly returned to her body.

“…..Hey, this is……”

The feeling of coarse stone disappeared. But what remained afterward was— a cold, slippery feeling. …… No way.

Zessel lifted his hand from Kate’s back. Stuck to his palm was a large amount of blood. —Oh no.

Now that the stone that had been stopping her bleeding was gone, her bleeding became worse.

“Sorry, but I’m going to take off your suit.”

Zessel took off Kate's suit jacket and pulled up the back of her shirt. The wound was small but deep. Was it the large snake's fangs that had injured her back? The problem was, the position of the wound was close to her heart.

Using some cloth to stop the bleeding, Zessel then wrapped a bandage over the wound and around Kate's shoulder to fix it in place.

"You're well-prepared, aren't you?"

While conducting the Reverse Song, Enne glanced at Zessel.

"For Red Reciters, if the situation becomes desperate, we can use our own blood as a catalyst. But the bleeding that results isn't something to joke about, so I always carry medical supplies with me."

But for this wound, would such a simple emergency treatment work?

"……There's……"

Faintly, with her eyes closed, Kate moved her lips.

"There's…… still…… more."

More?

Zessel reflexively looked around at his surroundings. The hallway was scattered with ash. Underneath the burnt cinders, something was wriggling.

—Did it hide because we were coming?

"Damn, we don't have time to deal with you right now !"

Zessel ground his teeth at the fact that his partner, the Blue Reciter Mirror, wasn't here. Airtight places were a Red Reciter's weak point. If he were to call out a large flame to defeat the enemy, he would be caught in it as well. In the worst case, the whole institution could burn down.

—So it's forcing us to go farther into the institution? A group of Recited creatures blocked the entranceway, their escape route.

"Zessel, what do we do?!"

"I'll carry Kate on my back. Run in the direction of the emergency passageway!"

The path they ran down led to the large room in the very center of the research institute.

Something was in there. Zessel was almost completely sure of that.

Part 4

Standing at both sides of the school's main gate were teachers who Ada recognized.

"Ada, where did you go? You can't just leave the school whenever you lik—"

"Sorry, Sensei! We can talk about it later!"

"Wha…… Wait, Ada!"

Ada forcefully shook off the hand that had grabbed her shoulder. With that momentum, she ran inside the school building.

—Although Kate-sensei had wanted her to report the situation, she couldn't just do that.

On the third floor of the branch school was the dorm room assigned to the girls in her class.

Ada rushed over to the corner of the empty room. Her baggage had been casually thrown on the floor, and leaning against the wall was something long and narrow wrapped in cloth.

……So in the end, there was only this?

Right now, this was the only way she could help the teacher left behind in the institution.

That's right, she didn't want to have any regrets.

"It's not like I've decided to be an Exorcist (Gillshe) or anything, Dad!"

She ran down the hallway. The sight of her carrying such a large object drew curious glances from students and teachers.

……Ahaha, how nostalgic. When she had entered Tremia and came out of the entrance ceremony holding her Exorcist Gil Spear, she had also been stared at like this.

Speaking of which, how had she made her very first friend?

Back then—

What crossed her mind was the image of a tall girl with black hair. It was the girl who was her roommate in Tremia Academy's female dorms. The girl had spoken to Ada first and by chance, they had been put in the same class. From there, they had gradually become friends.

She was the first friend Ada had made among the students in the Recitation school.

Ada turned the final corner leading to the lobby. Just before she turned, she spotted someone wearing a white Tremia Academy uniform. Ada ran down the hallway holding the absurdly long spear. When people saw her, were they surprised or did they tease her? She thought that everyone would fit in one of those two categories. But—

"Yo."

Around the corner was a student with one hand raised in greeting, looking at Ada.

She was a classmate who Ada recognized, with black hair and a tall body.

"……Serges?"

Why, why was she here?

"After causing such a commotion, you rushed back downstairs. Anyone would notice you. But moreover, that spear—"

"T-This is……!"

Ada reflexively hid the spear behind her back. But the spear was taller than herself. There was no way she could hide it.

"I-It's not what you think. U-Um…… I……"

She had intended to say something, but her voice wouldn't come out.

I……I'm a student studying at a Recitation school, same as you. This spear is….. I'm only taking it out just this once. So…… Please, don't hate me. I want us to stay friends forever and ever……

"Idiot, what are you muttering?"

As Ada flinched back, Serges suddenly touched her shoulder.

"Serges?"

"You decided, didn't you? You chose this path."

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps resounded throughout the hallway. Several teachers came running towards them.

"Hurry up and get going. I'll make up an explanation for this."

Smiling reassuringly, Serges gave Ada a push on the back.

"……Hey, Serges?"

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Even after this…… Can we still be friends?"

"You idiot."

The girl who Ada stood back to back with said in a sincere voice from the bottom of her heart.

"If you have time to worry about something like that, then go back to what you were doing!"

At that moment, Ada felt extremely heavy chains being lifted from her with a clanking noise.

The weight of the spear that she had gotten used to now felt lighter.

……Did you hear that, Dad?

Even if I'm not a Reciter, this is still the place where I belong. I have friends who are waiting for me here.

"It's fine. Sometimes, I just want to be a regular girl."

"Yeah yeah, I got it."

Other than that, Ada's friend didn't say anything else.

—Thank you.

Without looking back, Ada ran through the lobby.

Ada ran directly towards the school gate, where some teachers were standing.

"……Ada!"

Ada heard a familiar voice from behind. Looking back, she saw a girl running towards her with her scarlet hair fluttering.

"Ada, where are you going?! Both Neight and Kate-sensei are missing, so there's a huge commotion among the teachers!"

"Sorry, but I don't have time to talk about that right now."

"Wait!"

Ada turned around. But before she could run ahead, Kluele grabbed her shoulder.

"Does that mean you know where Kate-sensei and Neight are?"

"Kluele, I need to—"

Her words were cut off by Kluele.

"If you're in such a rush, then I can probably help you out."

Winking and letting out a small chuckle, Kluele's mouth softened into a smile.

"……Eh?"

She didn't understand. What did Kluele mean?

"Ada, can you make a little cut on my finger with that spear you're holding?"

"Kluele? Sorry, but I don't get—"

Before Ada could finish speaking, Kluele pressed her finger against the tip of the spear. Ada had no time to react. The girl's fingertip gently touched the sharpened spear.

"W-What are you doing?!"

"Ada. I told you before, I had also been feeling lost for a long time now."

Speaking in a gentle voice, Kluele turned around to face Ada.

"I used to be scared of Recitations. But when I told him that, he said 'I believe in you.' ……That was cunning of him. The way he supported me with all of his heart made me feel really embarrassed."

Him?

The person who Kluele used that word to describe…… Could it be?

"That person's identity is a secret."

Kluele showed a partly mischievous, partly shy smile.

"Because of that, I decided. If there's something I can do right here, right now— I won't be scared anymore, because I don't want to let down his belief in me."

On her fingertip, a single drop of red catalyst quivered in the breeze.

The red droplet was swept away by a gust of wind—and imperceptibly changed into countless feathers that burned with a crimson flame. There were hundreds, thousands of feathers. They didn't fall to the ground but fluttered in the air, as if embracing the girls.

The feathers looked familiar. Was this what Kluele had called out during the recital contest? But it was strange. This time, she hadn't sung a <Song (Oratorio) of Praise>.

[A <Song (words) of Praise> is not needed to call me out.]

That voice reached even Ada's ears.

It was a mysterious voice. Vague and fleeting, yet somehow very close by.

[Beloved little bird. Songstress without wings. Come, call out my name.]

A gentle wind blew. It was a gentle breeze that cleared their hearts, different from the salty breeze that surrounded them.

The blazing feathers fluttered in the air as if they were dancing. As if they were protecting the girl with scarlet hair.

After the red honorary ritual finished— A gigantic Recited creature with deep crimson wings stood silently behind Kluele as if it was snuggling up to her.

"……No way."

Ada took a step back as if she had been pushed.

It was a creature from stories, from legends. This creature was known to be a legend by not only those who studied Recitations, but even to regular people around the world.

It was unmistakably the Red True Spirit. In front of Kluele and Ada stood the noblest Recited creature.

[Please get on, chick with claws.]

Giving a small nod to the Reciter who had called it out, the Divine Bird of Dawn extended a wing towards Ada.

[Now, tell me the path you wish to go.]

Path. The place she must head to. That was……

……The path she chose was……

—You decided, didn't you? You chose *that* path—

The path she chose was surely different from everyone else's.

But she wouldn't hesitate anymore. After all, she had made that promise to the friend who sent her off.

"—How mean."

Ada curled her lips into a broad grin.

"You truly understood me, didn't you?"

After a moment of silence……

As if it was trying to match hers, a smile lit up in the divine bird's eyes.

[Very good, girl who should not be a Reciter. That was a very good decision.]

Final Play: Everyone Sings, O Path of the Singing Spear User

Part 1

Over his shoulder, Zessel could hear the breathing of his colleague who he carried on his back. She took weak, shallow breaths.

—Kate's bleeding wasn't stopping.

"It's only a bit farther, so hang on!"

There was no response from the woman he was carrying.

"……Hang on until then!"

From the preparation he had done before coming here, he knew that there was a door at the farthest end of the main hall which they could use to escape outside.

Zessel felt dizzy and had a headache. But even so, he continued to run.

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"……It's so quiet."

Was this the changing room? Rows of lockers were filled with staff lab clothing. Neight was hidden quietly inside one of the lockers.

……Kate-sensei.

In order to allow him and Ada to escape, their teacher had stayed behind, alone.

"—I……"

He felt a powerlessness similar to what he had felt during the recital contest. But the major difference was that now, he was truly alone in this place.

Arma, who had always been by his side, was not here. Mio, who had prepared a Night-colored catalyst for him, was not here. Finally, Kluele, who had watched over him as he recited, was not here.

……Am I alone again?

A long, long time ago, when he had still been in the custody of the orphanage, there hadn't been anyone he could talk to or rely on. So whenever morning came and he felt lonely, he would always want to hide under his futon. He wished for night to continue on forever and ever.

But.

He had been picked up by his mother, who had now passed away. Ever since then, something had begun to change little by little. He had met Arma and come to Tremia Academy where he met many people. He had met a kind girl with scarlet hair, the Reciter who continued to keep his promise with Mother, and also many classmates.

"That's why it's different now."

There were people who would stay by his side. He just couldn't meet them right now since he was hiding here. There was no point in him continuing to hide like this.

"I need to go find them."

Neight opened the locker door just a crack and looked around at his surroundings. There weren't any of snakes or lizards nearby.

He exited the changing room and headed down the hallway in the direction he had come from.

But after less than a few seconds, he felt something strange underfoot. He was shaking. Was he scared? No, that wasn't right. This was—

"What is this…… An earthquake?"

Part 2

Silently, the glow of the light fairy disappeared. Was it another grey Recited creature? Enne instantly became on guard, but after a while, she let out a sigh of relief.

After she composed herself and looked around, there was nothing worth taking notice of. The light of the fairy had simply been hidden by another light.

A faint beam of light lit up the dark hallway. It leaked out from behind a closed door and shone like rays of sunlight filtering through the leaves of trees.

"……That must be the main hall."

Enne knew that Zessel was talking to himself, but she nodded anyways.

Within the research institute blanketed in darkness, only the main hall deep inside the building was lit up. It would be a lie to call this just a coincidence. Judging from the situation until now, the possibility that they had arrived at a completely safe location was nearly zero. Even deciding whether or not to enter the room would be a risky bet. What awaited them there was probably—

……However, they had no choice but to enter. Beyond the door was a place to take refuge. Kate's body couldn't endure much longer. They had to make a quick decision and head for medical supplies.

Zessel kicked open the door. Even though the brightness of the room was forcing him to close his eyes, he took a look around the room.

Squinting, Enne looked around.

—So it's like this, huh?

She gritted her teeth. Finally, they could see through the troublesome farce.

"So this is the cause of everything."

In the center of the spacious room, lying on an ornate lantern studded with gemstones, was a grey <Egg>. It was just like a grey king sitting on a throne that shone with five colors. Glancing around, Enne and Zessel could see five colored <Eggs> in the corners of the room.

"……So this really is an institution just for refining these catalysts."

Zessel, who carried Kate on his back, muttered sarcastically.

He had heard that one <Egg> of each of the five colors had been brought to Tremia Academy.

If so, then it wouldn't be unusual to have a fair number of <Eggs> still remaining in this institute.

"Did an <Egg> run wild in this research institute as well?"

"We can't say for sure yet."

Enne shook her head lightly.

She had heard that only catalysts of the five existing colors had been brought to the campus. If the <Eggs> refined in this institute were only of those five colors, then just what was that grey <Egg>? Furthermore, they hadn't seen any grey <Eggs> so far except for the one in this room. A single catalyst going out of control wouldn't make sense considering the large number of grey Recited creatures. To call out so many of them, there would need to be at least two, no, at least three <Eggs>.

And then there were the words written in blood on the stone monument……

—That's enough.

"We should stop worrying about the complicated situation for now."

Right now, they didn't need to analyze the situation. Safely overcoming this dilemma and escaping was their top priority.

"Zessel, don't touch that catalyst."

Touching the <Egg> would force someone to conduct a Recitation. Although they didn't know what the trick behind that was, it had already been proven before during the recital contest.

"……Kate, hang on."

Kate already had no strength left to raise her upper body. Although he also looked tired himself, Zessel shifted the position of Kate on his back.

In the back of the room, standing out from the grey walls surrounding it, was a scarlet door. It was like what he had seen on a map of the research institute. Going through that door should lead outside.

Suddenly.

"……An earthquake?"

Zessel raised an eyebrow slightly. As if in harmony with that movement, Enne felt faint vibrations at her feet. Dry flakes of paint peeled off from the ceiling.

It felt strange. She had experienced this feeling before.

Deja-vu? No, it was different. She, Zessel, Mirror, and Xins had felt the ground shake in exactly the same way during the recital contest.

The <Egg> was going out of control. Back then, the ground had rumbled as the creature came into existence.

“Enne!”

Zessel's tone of voice changed into one that sounded like there was a scream or warning mixed in. On the other side of the door they had come in from, grey creatures slowly crawled forth from the shadows of the corridor.

“Damn, just how many traps did they set?!”

“Zessel, let’s hurry! We can’t handle all of—”

—Her feet stopped.

"……No way."

Of the egg-shaped catalysts that rolled around freely in the four corners of the room, two were activated and emitting light. It would be fine if that was the only thing. But the problem was, they were the two <Eggs> closest to their escape route.

The Recitation light disappeared and a Recited creature emerged from each of the two used <Eggs>.

Behind Enne and Zessel were a group of grey Recited creatures. Floating in front of them was a small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit and coiled up beside that was an Amphisbaena with a green body.[1]

—They were surrounded. The circle of creatures gradually closed in around them.

"Kate…… I'll do what I can, but…… Sorry, this might turn into the worst possible scenario."

Slithering on the floor, the Amphisbaena came at them from below. Grey snakes crawled along the ceiling. On either side were grey lizards and the small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit.

There were too many of them!

——[Red Song Keinez]——

Aiming at the several grey lizards that were closest to him, Zessel called out roaring flames. However, the flames were suppressed enough that they wouldn't flare up and backfire. Zessel could clearly see grey shadows continuing to advance within the crimson heat wave.

—This much fire isn't enough to stop them?

In order to defeat the Amphisbaena coming at them from the front, Enne shifted her position.

She took an instant to glance at her colleague. Nearly two meters directly behind him was the small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit. It had silently crept up so close behind him that it frightened her. Its attack range should be about as far as the height of a person. Then that distance was— Oh no!

"Zessel, behind you!"

Zessel quickly turned around. Because the small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit was too close, he reflexively backed

up. But before he could do so, his knees buckled. In the face of imminent danger, he had forgotten that he still carried Kate on his back. Her weight hindered his movements.

The light emitted by the small yellow spirit (will-o'-wisp) changed from yellow to blue. Silk-like threads shot out from its glowing spherical body.

Zessel instinctively realized that couldn't dodge them.

Get down
O muas dowa

……Get down?

Before Zessel could comprehend those words, both he and Kate fell to the ground as if guided by the power of the Serafeno Musical Language.

The scarlet door that led to their escape route turned an even brighter shade of red.

At that instant, the door burst apart with a loud noise. The splinters of the smashed door struck the

small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit in front of Zessel and crashed into the walls of the room at high speed.

……What just happened?

A giant crimson bird came to a stop on the floor of the large room in a way that couldn't be called elegant.

Was that the Divine Bird Phoenix of Dawn?

Enne froze, even forgetting about her surroundings. Before her eyes was the extremely rare and famous Recited creature that had become like a fantasy among Reciters.

"Quick, Enne-sensei, come over here!"

"Ada?"

Seeing the face of the girl who rode the giant bird, Enne was dazed and speechless.

"Zessel-sensei, get on with Kate-sensei!"

Another girl, one with hair the same color as the divine bird's wings, beckoned them over.

"Are you Kluele?"

Zessel opened his eyes. He realized that this was probably one of the students he had taught a lecture to.

"Sensei, do you know where Chibi-kun is?"

Ada jumped off the divine bird's back. In her hand was— a long spear that gleamed metallically?

"Chibi?"

"Ah, I mean Neight-kun. He came here with me and Kate-sensei."

"……Sorry, but we haven't seen anyone other than Kate."

But contrary to the teachers' expectations, the light-hearted expression remained on Ada's face.

"It's okay, it's fine just knowing that. If we look around, we should be able to find him."

Tossing only those words over her shoulder, Ada calmly walked away from them by herself. Did she really intend to go look for Neight?

"……A-Ada! What are you doing?!"

All at once, the Recited creatures that had paused in their steps now attacked the girl who walked through the main hall away from the Divine Bird[Phoenix] of Dawn.

"Ada, behind you!"

Kluele yelled, still sitting on the back of the divine bird .

Directly behind Ada was the small yellow[will-o'-wisp] spirit that should have been thrown back into the wall.

But despite the warning, Ada did not turn around.

"—Got it."

The small yellow[will-o'-wisp] spirit stretched out a glowing tentacle. At the same time, with her back facing it, Ada stabbed her spear behind her. The glowing tentacle and the spear passed by each other—

"The small yellow[will-o'-wisp] spirit's attack range is 1.673 meters. On the other hand, my Exorcist[Gil] Spear is 1.895 meters."

The glowing tentacle stopped only a finger-width away from Ada's back.

However, the girl's spear pierced the small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit, which began to shudder.

"In other words, if I hold my spear at 0.2 meters away from one end and stab it out, the enemy's attack will miss me by 0.022 meters."

Miss. As Ada spoke that word, the small yellow will-o'-wisp spirit turned into specks of light and was sent away.

She had been…… only 2.2 centimeters away from death.

Ada still didn't turn around to face her opponent. No, she hadn't even looked at the spear she was holding. If she had gripped her spear only a finger-width farther down, what would have happened?

"I definitely won't make a mistake, not even by a millimeter."

As if reading their minds, Ada muttered.

"……That much practice has been hammered into me ever since I was young."

Her voice sounded strangely sad.

Difficulty to suppress— Easy.

Enne finally understood why the girl hadn't turned around to look at her opponent.

It could be described as 'not interested'. Ada's gaze had already turned to the next enemy she needed to defeat.

"There are twenty-seven creatures in total, thirteen of which I don't know details about."

The Amphisbaena attacked from below.

Fangs dripping with poison touched the end of Ada's foot— The distance between them created that illusion, but the snake's fangs cut only empty air.

Raising its heads, the Recited creature emitted a green Recitation light and was sent away.

"Twenty-six left. Yeah, I'll be just fine. It'll be easier to search for Chibi-kun after I finish them off."

Ada stood behind the snake.

—She's fast. No…… more like graceful?

She moved her body smoothly and naturally. If she were to move like that underwater, probably not a single ripple would form on the water's surface. Her movements were so fluid that they could be thought of like that. Enne still couldn't comprehend how Ada had dodged the attacking snake just now.

"Finish them…… all off?"

This was the girl who had been taking Enne's practice test only yesterday. Remembering the name written on the exam sheet, Enne's breath caught in her throat.

Ada Yung Gillshuvesher.

Master of the Exorcist Spear— Enne had heard that it was the greatest title among Exorcists. Had this young sixteen-year-old girl already earned that title?

Even Klaus, the leader of the Exorcists Gillshe had earned the title in his twenties. But this girl who was studying Recitations at a Recitation school had already gotten it?

She couldn’t believe it so suddenly, but the scene before her eyes was an undeniable truth.

The girl danced, leaving behind only the quiet sound of her breathing. She directly confronted the Recited creatures with her own body.

This dance in which she wagered her life made even those watching feel afraid.

Was that because it was dangerous? No, the dance itself sent shivers up their spines.

Ada attacked the large snakes dropping from the ceiling while dodging the Amphisbaena by her feet and evading the lizards' claws by only a few millimeters. Synchronized with her amazing movements, the metallic spear was like a whip, cutting through the air as it attacked its enemies.

Delicate yet bold. Quick yet serene. Magnificent yet cruel. Even though it was just a spear, it was as sharp as a sword. Even though it was just a spear, it drew curves as beautifully as a bow.

In the first place, even though she was just a single girl , there were nearly thirty enemies. All of them attacked Ada as if they had forgotten everyone else. But despite being surrounded on all four sides, the girl danced without pausing even once. It was a dance of death filled with such tension that even Enne's heartbeat seemed to freeze. But even so, there was no rage or impatience in Ada.

……No, she wasn't the student Enne knew. She wasn't the Reciter Enne knew. She was— Someone who shouldn 't be a Reciter.

Ada swung the spear, cutting down two more enemies at once. As Recitation light streamed out in their throes of death, the Recited creatures were sent away one by one.

There were thirteen remaining. Then, the girl's movements stopped for the first time.

Ada carried the spear in her right hand, with her left hand hanging loosely at her side.

"Ada, your left hand!"

As if compelled by Kluele's scream, Enne looked at Ada's hand…… And her breath caught in her throat. On Ada's tanned brown arm, her wrist that had turned grey was strikingly visible.

"……Did I get grazed?"

A monotonous voice escaped Ada's lips. The remaining thirteen creatures before her were all grey Recited creatures.

"Ada, that's enough! Step away from them!"

The girl had singlehandedly defeated more than a dozen Recited creatures. It was more than enough. She and the others needed to quickly escape this institution.

"I can't do that."

With her back facing them, Ada shook her head defiantly.

"Ada!"

Why? Why was she so persistent? What could she do, with one arm already turned to stone?

"……Because I'm a useless girl."

That's right. A useless girl who wanted to be a Reciter but couldn't— Was it Enne's imagination? She thought she heard Ada say those words.

Front, back, left, right. A group of Recited creatures advanced from every direction. It wasn't a number that could be easily dealt with. What did Ada intend to do with only one hand?

At that moment, Ada shouted out.

"Sensei, what color?"

—Out of the five colors, which color was the Reverse Song of Grey Recitations closest to?

Only Enne understood the meaning behind Ada's words. Perhaps that was because she had been this Gillshe Exorcist's 'teacher', even if for not a very long time.

"It's the color that you chose!"

Enne used all of the air remaining in her lungs to convey that message to the girl.

Instead of replying, the tip of the spear that Ada held shone white. The pearl embedded in the spear tip became active as a gemstone for reversing Recitations.

Then, the Exorcist[Gillshe] pierced her left hand with her Exorcist Spear[Gil].

There was a sound like glass shattering.

With a clear, crisp sound, the curse that had turned her arm to stone was instantly exorcised. The movements of the grey Recited creatures slowed down, as if they understood the implication behind it. They hesitated for less than the blink of an eye. It was a length of time that couldn't even be called an opening. However, that was more than enough for the Exorcist[Gillshe] girl.

——[Nussis][Return]——

Leaving behind only afterimages of the spear tip, the white, shining Exorcist Spear[Gil] swung in all directions.

Like steam rising up, all of the Recited creatures remaining in the room emitted white smoke and disappeared.

As if yielding her body to the smoke, the girl holding the Exorcist Gil Spear quietly closed her eyes.

Part 3

The faint tremors stopped. Just how long had they gone on for?

Quickly rising to his feet, Neight glanced around at his surroundings.

The single path out seemed to gradually curve to the right. Because he had escaped by running down the left fork, taking that path should lead him straight ahead of where he was before.

……Nothing's out there, right?

Although he checked behind him every few seconds, there were no signs of the mysterious grey creatures chasing after him. Because the hallway lights were off, he continued forward by relying on the emergency lights.

“Evacuation…… route.”

Those words were engraved on a plate attached to the wall of the hallway.

If he were to continue farther down this path, he should reach an evacuation door.

He continued to walk forward again, but before he could take a step— His body trembled.

“E-Eh?”

It wasn’t just his body. The floor, the walls, the ceiling. Everything trembled like they were screaming.

An earthquake? And it was larger than the one that happened a little while ago.

……Just what was going on?

***

“Ada, that was amazing! I never knew you could do that!”

As her classmate carrying a spear returned, Kluele involuntarily cheered.

She had known that Ada was in the spear-wielding club, but never knew her friend was this talented. During class, Ada never acted anything like it.

“Yeah…… Well, it’s just a skill I have.”

Talking in an ambiguous manner, her classmate scratched the back of her head. She had shown godly skills back then, but strangely, a lonely expression shadowed her face.

“Kluele, hurry up and take the teachers back to school.”

The three teachers: Kate, Enne, and Zessel. And then there was Kluele and Ada. Although together they

would be extremely heavy, the divine bird said it was no problem.

"Alright. Ada, get on."

But instead of getting on the bird's back, Ada smiled bitterly and shrugged.

"I'm going to find Chibi-kun. It was me who brought him along, so I feel responsible for him."

"But……"

[Let us go. We must hurry.]

The divine bird raised its head. ……Sure enough, thinking things through calmly, what Ada and the divine bird said made sense. The problem was their homeroom teacher, Kate. The wound on her back was deep and she needed to be transported to a medical facility right away.

"Sorry Ada, but I'll be right back."

"How unfortunate, to be told that by the Demon of Lateness."

Ada joked lightly. Before Kluele could reply with 'You're also like that!'……

Wind, sneer at the transience of sand crawling on the ground
loar dime, Hir qusi fluse feo nen rawa cley

Feathers, laugh at the foolishness of ashes drunk on flames
sheza dime, Hir qusi nazarie feo eza da wavir uc corne

The voice came from somewhere unknown and soared around the calm room.

At the same time.

——Crack!——

It was the sound of something hard cracking. The sound was quiet but unusually clear, echoing throughout the room.

A lonely prison, a banquet of trash, the defeated laughs at the unending tragedy
solitie kaon, writh lef eza, lastis os fisa endehec mofy

The throne hungers for a king, but sitting on the seat is only dust
arsei glio, ovan ezis glia jes reive

A husky elderly voice sang a strange melody.

No, it wasn't just a regular song. Was it a <Song of Praise (Oratorio)>?

"W-What……? There's more?"

Everything in nature changes. Along with the chair, I flow to dust
omunis via-c-univa, Yer sis tera peg ezis, eza

If that is so, then there is no winner in this world
zette yupa thes I neckt loern

The melody which they thought was the malice of the dead came from the single remaining <Egg>—

"Ada, get on right now! That <Egg> seems dangerous!"

After Enne spoke, Zessel's face paled.

The grey catalyst in the middle of the room.

Its outer layer gradually tore off like it was breaking out of its shell. A grey glow leaked out from inside.

Come, born children, thou art the children who serve thy king
Isa da boema foton doremren Ser la lemenent, clar lef ilmei arsa

In thy hands are the king's swords, twelve of them become a shadow over power
jes effectis qusi fo Lastihyt, ecta peg sterei orza

[It seems this research institute itself is a trap.]

The divine bird glared—

The Recitation light shone conspicuously. Particles of light traced out a helix shape and a silver shadow appeared in the center.

[And so, this seems to be the final and worst trap.]

Everything in the world now becomes the defeated — It is the day when the twelve plates of silver, the king's swords, roar
miqvy O evoia arsei tearl dis elmaei I — sterei efflectis Ezehyt = ende arsa

Something silver-colored appeared there.

It was nearly two meters tall. Its shape resembled a humanoid made of long and narrow metal needles. Silver swords grew directly out of the parts where the hands were meant to be. It looked very much like something manmade, different from the species of Recited creatures usually called out from Recitations and the grey Recited creatures. —Floating in the air around

the True Spirit as if they were protecting it were twelve bladed weapons that glowed silver, including spears, swords, and axes.

……No way, was it the True Spirit of Grey Recitations ?

It was a silver Recited creature with a blade in each hand, as well as twelve more around it.

The True Spirit slowly raised the weapons in its hands …… And the instant they became aware of that.

The True Spirit was standing directly in front of them.

[……It's fast.]

The divine bird spoke in an amazed voice.

It had moved suddenly, without any warning. Its movements were also frighteningly quick and smooth. Goosebumps rose all over Kluele's body as she watched the True Spirit. It moved in a way similar to how Ada had.

The raised swords pointed in the direction of the divine bird and swung down.

"—What a fool."

The attacking flash of silver was blocked by another flash of silver that swung up from below.

"Girl with the stick, watch where you're swinging it!"

Alone, the girl wielding the spear stood her ground in front of the True Spirit.

"Ada?"

"Go on ahead of me. I said before, right? I'll go find Chibi-kun and then return to school."

"What are you saying? Ada, hurry up and get on!"

Keeping her gaze fixed on the enemy in front of her, Ada silently shook her head. At the same time……

……Plop.

A tiny drop of water hit the floor.

"A-Ada, what are you……?"

"Please…… Go ahead of me."

That drop of water had fallen from the girl's eye.

"I'm a useless person, so this is the only thing I can do."

She slowly turned her head.

Her eyes brimming with tears were like the shore of a lake.

"……I wanted to become a Reciter."

—She was crying.

It was the first time Kluele had seen Ada cry. Large teardrops rolled down Ada's cheeks.

"At first, I hated the path that my idiot parents had decided for me, so I wanted to do the exact opposite and become a Reciter. It was such a lame reason. After I had a fight with my parents and left, I came to this school."

She tightly gripped her spear. Even though the True Spirit slowly moved closer to her, she was still defenselessly facing the other direction.

“But as I studied, Reciting started to seem more interesting. I started to think that I truly wanted to become a Reciter. That’s something I can't deny. I made many friends, and honestly, it was the first time I’ve done that. Until now…… I’ve always…… always……”

‘—Let’s say for example that there was a student in the class other than Chibi-kun who was alone. If that were so , what would you do, Kluele?’

Her voice trembled. Her body trembled.

Her tears trembled. Her sigh trembled.

The extremely delicate and fragile girl cried uncontrollably.

“That’s what I should have been thinking. ……But this is the first time. For the first time, I'm glad to be an Exorcist.”
Gillshe

Without trying to hide her tears, Ada showed an unfitting smile.

“I’m…… a useless idiot…… It seems like this is the only path for me.”

Everyone who saw that smile was left speechless.

It was extremely fragile, yet extremely determined.

The manner in which Ada behaved was — unmistakably that of an Exorcist[Gillshe].

“But Ada, even if it’s you, there’s no way you can face this monster alone……”

“Don’t worry. Compared to this puppet, my stubborn father is a hundred times worse.”

The stone wall and ceiling now collapsed. Was it due to the rumbling a while ago, or was it yet another trap?

[……Kluele, let’s leave this place.]

The divine bird gently flapped its wings.

……Ada definitely wouldn't listen if she was told to escape.

She was an Exorcist(Gillshe) who had stayed in a Recitation school.

And now— If this was the path she chose……

"Ada, you need to return to the school with Neight as quickly as possible! It's a promise, alright?"

The only thing Kluele could do right now was to believe in her classmate.

……Yeah, yeah. Understood, class representative.

Continuing to smile, Ada watched the divine bird cross through the evacuation door.

—But I might be a bit late.

Turning her gaze back to the enemy before her, Ada transferred the spear that she had held in both hands to only one hand.

It was her Exorcist(Gil) Spear that she had received before she could understand what was going on.

After several years of training, she had gotten to know the Exorcist Gil Spear's weight within one gram of error and its length within one millimeter of error. What she could and could not do with the Exorcist Gil Spear had all been engraved into her. —After she had accomplished that, for the first time, her father had allowed her to call herself an Exorcist Gillshe.

Thirteen years old. It was the moment when the youngest Exorcist Gillshe in history had been born.

And now, it was three years after that.

The spear had already become a part of her body. There was no link between the spear and the arm she wielded it with. Both of them were her spear and both of them were her arm.

"Now, all that's left is for the two of us to fight alone."

……Speaking of which, it's been a long time since I've talked to you.

Ada wiped away the tears on her cheeks. The True Spirit drew closer to her, cutting down the nearby walls

as if they were made of thin paper. They cut down anything they touched —The twelve silver blades protected the True Spirit by circling it at high speed. Ada ’s skin hurt like she had been burned. It wasn’t due to the blades but the blood thirst emitted by the enemy.

This opponent was undeniably strong. Ada had to admit that. As the Reciter she was now, she definitely couldn’t win. If so, then had the half year she spent as a Reciter been a complete waste? ……No.

There was one thing she had learned from the school for Reciters.

Because she couldn’t win like this, she had to Recite.

It was something she knew the best, but also something she hated the most— The her of the past.

—Through great reverence and dignity, I carve out my name
O toga Wem millmo, HIr shoul da ora peg ilmeri giris ende zorm

Sing. Remember.

She didn't need daydreams or fantasies that she had created.

She just needed to call back the her of those days.

The her who she had cut away in the past. She had let go of and turned her back to her memories as an Exorcist[Gillshe].

The her who had innocently loved only her Exorcist Spear[Gil], who had lived together with her Exorcist Spear[Gil]— Right now, she called back that part of her just one more time.

Dreams and wishes, I threw them all to the distant past (behind)
ole shan ilis, peg loar, peg kei, Hir et univa sm hid

I cannot even turn around to look at that path anymore
Hir be qusi Gillisu xshao ele sm thes, neckt ele

She spun her spear in one hand. Each spin was faster, stronger, more beautiful.

She hated her parents and the people around her talking about her natural talent. That was why she had continued to practice tirelessly in a place where nobody could see her.

Be the beginning of the one sent home (seen off)
Lor be se Gillisu feo olfey cori ende olte

My whole life is simply meant for singing, dancing, and living with my spear
lipps hypne cooka, fifsia-c-ect-c-ele peg Gill, jes qusi giris

She had come to a Recitation school but neglected her Recitation studies.

She had joined the spear-wielding club but ditched practices whenever she felt like it.

However— Training to become an Exorcist[Gillshe] was the one thing she couldn't stop doing.

There are no flowers at my funeral, no name is needed on

my gravestone
leide neckt ele sm Yem hypne, reive zayxuy lostasia Yem nehhe

I only need my rusted spear thrust upright into my corpse
O la Laspha, Wem shel zo hearsa lipps sm cley

Her blood blisters had burst, the skin of her palms had been torn, and her eyes had teared up with pain. But even so, she had still held onto her Exorcist[Gil] Spear. There had been times when she lost consciousness while being pounded by chilly winter rain and her skin had nearly festered after being scorched by insanely hot summer heat. But even so, she hadn't let go of her Exorcist[Gil] Spear.

Her Exorcist[Gil] Spear wouldn’t betray her. The more she swung it, the sharper it would become. The more she cried, the stronger it would become.

That’s right. They had walked together for far enough a distance that she could declare that with certainty.

Now sing praise, many colors, many called out children
Isa O ora, sterei Ies, sterei da cooka doremren

The spear cut through the air, as if changing into an armor of blades that enveloped the girl's body.

As it cut through the air, it sung a tune that resembled a song.

The tanned spear-user sang a tanned melody.

Here and now, the one thing after setting free all of the names—
Jes nehhe qusi Ies, arsei spil, Seo la miqvy virgia

If she were to bear not the title of a Reciter, but of an Exorcist[Gillshe].

If the one who should protect her back and the opponent before her who she should defeat were here.

—As one who bore the ultimate title, there was one path she couldn't step away from.

There is already nothing that can bind my spear
bekwist Yem nehhe olfey besti Gillshuvesher

Her impatience and rage faded away far into the distance .

The burning and excitement of her body made her unable to feel even the rumbling around her.

"I'm coming, True Spirit! I'll show you the power of a Master of the Exorcist Spear!" Gillshuvesher

There were no more Reciters in the room.

The time when she had wavered in the gap between song and spear had passed.

—Ada Yung Gillshuvesher was coming.

***

……Was the earthquake still not over?

The large tremors from before had passed, but weak vibrations that shook his hair still continued.

Suddenly, the noise changed.

It was no longer the crushing sound of the wall collapsing, but clear, metallic reverberations. The incessant clashing of two hard things created a cold, sharp melody. He could hear the sounds echoing from the direction he had come from.

"……There's a light?"

Was that a door? Silver light shone through from the cracks around the door.

The sounds were coming from— the other side?

Peering through to the other side of the door, Neight caught his breath.

There was a True Spirit made of metallic silver rods arranged in a humanoid shape. It wielded long blades

that grew out of its hands and used them to slash at its opponent.

The opponent blocking its way was— A single girl with tanned skin who wielded a spear.

……Ada-san?

Right, left. The two blades slashed downward in less than a second. Ada blocked the right blade with the tip of her spear, and with the momentum of her blocking movement, turned her gaze to the left blade. The silver flash it created was already coming close to the tip of her nose.

—I can't block it in time. While parrying the edge of the blade with her spear, Ada pressed her body close to the floor. The silver spear and the axe passed by where her neck had been moments before.

"Hah!"

With a loud breath, she swung at the protective blades floating in the air. Claaaang. With a reverberating sound like striking a bell of ice, a spear and an axe disappeared.

"……Eight left."

She stepped back, putting approximately four meters of distance between herself and her pursuer who approached closer.

4.42 meters, that was her reach. On the other hand, she had already confirmed that her opponent's reach was 4.14 meters. 28 centimeters— It was a tiny distance that she would have to rely on her speed and her weapon's reach to surpass. But the protective weapons surrounding the True Spirit flew irregularly around it within a six meter range.

Ada had no choice but to stay out of the True Spirit's range. If it rushed in, then her spear would lose its length advantage. Therefore, she should be standing between 4.14 meters to 4.42 meters away from her opponent. Any closer than that would be within the enemy's range and any farther meant the floating blades could attack her while she couldn't strike back.

A space of 28 centimeters. That was the small boundary separating life and death, triumph and defeat. Leaving that space or being pushed out of it would mean defeat. However, right now, they were locked in a stalemate.

—She needed to find a way to tip the scales in her favor. What could she do?

But while she had been focused on thinking, the True Spirit had closed the distance.

……So it's a strange enemy without any common sense, huh?

Its sword flashed down at a speed that an ordinary person would be unable to keep up with. With speed that could slay an enemy in the blink of an eye, it gouged, pierced, thrust, slashed down— but then abruptly retreated. Just when Ada thought it was retreating, it lunged forward at an intense speed. Then, just when they were about to clash, it suddenly slowed down and retreated again.

Its movements were unpredictable.

It attacked irregularly without any particular style of fighting. Without breathing like a person, without the attack range of a person, it attacked randomly as if mocking people's swordsmanship. Ada wasn't even sure which way to look.

……No, she couldn't be bothered by it. She needed to breathe steadily.

She twisted to avoid its right-side sword that stabbed forward. She curved her body to avoid its left-side sword that drew closer to her. The silver flash grazed her cheek. She felt hot blood flowing down, as if a layer of skin had been peeled off.

But in exchange, she had avoided her opponent's attack.

Ada thrust her Exorcist[Gil] Spear forward as fast as she could. Embedded in its tip was a pearl. The milky white tip of the spear lunged at the True Spirit's body.

However, what the spear pierced wasn't its body, but one of the protective blades surrounding it.

"—Not again!"

Ada unintentionally let out a bitter sigh.

While fighting the True Spirit, she had realized that the twelve blades dancing around it were both its weapons and its defense. In order to land a single hit on the True Spirit, she first had to send back the blades. Out of the original twelve, seven remained.

Blood mixed with the sweat running down her cheeks.

She had already seen through her opponent's weak points. Its body was comprised of silver blades and what held them together in the middle was an <Egg> glowing dark grey. It wasn't difficult to think that the <Egg> was the core holding the True Spirit in this world.

……Ada could still move her body. She was fine.

Before her movements became sluggish and her mind became exhausted, she needed to send back all of the blades protecting the enemy. After that, she could hit its core with her Exorcist[Gil] Spear.

"Let's go, Exorcist[Gil] Spear."

Nodding at the spear she was holding……

——Craaaaaack——

An ice-cold sound rang out from beside her hand. Willpower, strength, determination, resolve. It was a sad sound…… as if all of that had been drained away.

"……My Exorcist Gil Spear?"

At first, she thought it was a hallucination. She couldn't believe it. But the more she stared at it, the more it proved to be real.

About halfway down her spear, thin cracks like a spider web had appeared.

……Ada-san?

Something had happened to her. Even Neight, who was just an onlooker, could understand that much.

Something had suddenly disappeared from Ada. Strength? No, it was something more basic.

As if her will to fight had vanished, she only dodged the opponent's attacks. That's right. She only dodged. She didn't block or parry the attacks with her spear. She did nothing but continue to step back.

But— that was absurd. Even if it was Ada, there was no way that she could fully avoid all of the attacks.

In the blink of an eye, Ada had been pushed back until her back touched the wall. With one swift move, the True Spirit closed the distance between itself and the girl who had nowhere left to run. While its sword sliced Ada's shoulder and slashed at her abdomen, a floating axe chopped down at her foot.

"Ada-san!"

Crossing through the doorway, Neight ran to the girl's side.

……No way. Hey, this can't be true, right?

Ada couldn't believe that a crack had appeared on her Exorcist Gil Spear. Nothing like that had ever happened until now. She had never neglected to take care of it.

Even when using it normally, she had made sure to be careful with it. Even with the fighting just now, it had only clashed with other blades no more than a few times. Considering the Exorcist Gil Spear's sturdiness, something like that shouldn't have damaged it this much— Then was this because of a different reason?

She could only think of one other reason.

Creatures with life, objects with a shape, a single truth applied to all of them— That is, the restriction called ' lifespan'. After enduring around a dozen years of rigorous training, the result was that the Exorcist Gil Spear's limit had come more quickly.

……No, no way. There's no way that's true.

Wasn't it a part of her? The first friend she had made?

—Are you leaving me?

—Was this my fault?

Everything that reached its limit crumbled noisily.

The True Spirit swung its sword down. She might have been able to block with her Exorcist Gil Spear. However, she couldn’t do that no matter what.

“Ugh!”

She twisted her body and dodged. A sharp pain ran along her shoulder. It was a small but deep cut.

……But she didn’t care.

If she had taken that blow with her Exorcist Gil Spear, its lifespan would have been shortened even more. That was something she definitely didn’t want.

She ran from the floating weapons and the swords wielded by her opponent.

—Thump. She felt something hard against her back. The wall?

At the same time, the True Spirit turned towards her and closed the distance between them in a single movement. Ada tried once more to widen the distance between her and the stabbing sword, but her feet wouldn ’t move.

"Ow!"

The floating axe gouged her calf. The pain blurred out the world around her for a split second. When she came to her senses, she saw the True Spirit raising its large sword in front of her.

……She couldn't avoid it!

Did she have to defend with the Exorcist Gil Spear? Wasn't there another option?

Her thoughts swirled around in vain. Her body wouldn't move.

"Ada-san!"

The sword heading down towards her suddenly stopped. Pausing in its tracks, the True Spirit turned around to look behind itself. An intruder had entered the main hall. It was a small boy with a young-looking face.

……Chibi-kun?

With the sound of metal scraping on metal, the True Spirit ran off. Its target was—

No…… Don't, Chibi-kun…… Run away, hurry…… Don't come here.

"Don't come over here!"

"Eh?"

Stunned, the boy froze. The True Spirit directly ahead him raised its large sword. Neight looked up helplessly. The sudden attack left him unable to comprehend the situation.

"Ah…… Ah……"

Intimidated by the True Spirit advancing towards him, Neight was frozen in place.

A Reciter who could call things out without singing a <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> was a different matter, but other Reciters were weak when attacked directly. That was why Exorcists (Gillshe) existed, to stand as a shield before Reciters. There happened to be an Exorcist (Gillshe) here. Moreover, there was a Reciter right in front of her.

……No. Ada didn’t want to regret anymore. There was a friend getting hurt right in front of her. Wasn’t that why she had felt so pitiful during the recital contest?

Couldn’t she protect anyone? If not, then what was the use of her spear?

Its life would end without having done anything.

Was that what her Exorcist(Gil) Spear truly wished for?

‘Ada. Do you truly think this path is nothing but boring?’

‘Anyone born into a family of Exorcists(Gillshe) will struggle with that question at least once. —I was also like that.’

‘But one day, I realized.’

……That’s right. Hadn’t her father told her something like that?

'……Father, I don’t understand.'

‘It’s not that you don’t understand. You just haven’t realized it yet.’

She had finally realized. She realized what her father's eyes had been trying to tell her that day.

'I'm…… a useless idiot…… It seems like this is the only path for me.'

After searching for something she could do, that was the result she chose.

She chose it out of her own free will.

There was no turning back. For as long as she lived, she would have no choice but to walk down this path.

It would be an extremely rigorous and boring path. ……But even so.

—By going down this path, she could definitely protect someone.

Merciless flashes of silver flew down towards Neight. They came from the two swords that the True Spirit wielded as well as the protective blades revolving around the True Spirit.

They were all knocked aside by a glittering milky-white slash.

"……A-Ada-san……"

"Are you alright, Chibi-kun?"

Neight nodded wordlessly. Ada lightly patted his head.

She then glanced at her spear. The cracks on its tip were growing larger.

After the next attack, she would probably have to bid it farewell.

……Was it willing to fight together with her until the very end?

"Chibi-kun, do you have a catalyst?"

Speaking quickly without even moving her lips, she asked the boy behind her.

"Eh? Y-Yes."

"Then can you do me a favor? Right now, can you conduct the very first Recitation you tried to show everyone?"

She didn't mean the Recitation from the recital contest, but the one he conducted on the very first day he had transferred into the school. She wanted to make use of the <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> he had sung in the laboratory.

"Eh…… B-But I still can't do it properly yet."

"I don't mind if you fail. Also, make sure you sing the <Song of Praise (Oratorio)> loud enough that even the True Spirit can hear it!"

"—!"

A tense expression appeared on Neight's face. He finally realized what Ada was planning to do.

"Ada-san, it will probably disappear in under a minute. ……Please make sure you time it properly!"

Giving only a wink in response, Ada leaped forward directly in front of the True Spirit.

The True Spirit had two swords, as well as the protective blades flying around. Ada twisted her body, leaped, and dodged. She couldn't block attacks with her Exorcist Spear (Gil), which could only withstand one more

blow. In order to use that blow wisely, right now she had no choice but to continue dodging.

Descend, dark curtain of twilight
"—cart lef dimi-l-shadi denca-c-dowa"

From behind Ada, the <Song of Praise> that Neight sang resounded all throughout the main hall.

Oratorio

I praise the distant (your) name
YeR be orator Lom nehhe

Dark, courageous, pitiful (sorrowful)
lor besti bluci ende branousi -l- symphoeki

Master's single wing (transient master)
O she saira qersonie Laspha—

A Night-colored Recital gate slowly formed by Neight's feet.

Channel

Pulling back her spear so that the large sword passed by only a hairsbreadth away, Ada leaped forward towards her opponent's torso with all of her strength.

At the same time, Neight's Recitation ended with its final verse.

——[Night Song Ezel]]——

Just then, for an instant, the room was enveloped in thick black smoke.

It was the result of his Recitation going out of control.

The True Spirit, Neight, and Ada. All of their visions turned completely dark, making them unable to see anything at all.

……However!

Despite the stinging smoke, Ada opened her eyes. She had done training to see in the dark before, but right now she had a different purpose in mind. The glittering grey <Egg> in the center of her opponent was the only light that could still be seen in the darkness.

—So that's where it was!

Abandoning any thoughts of defense, Ada simply thrust her Exorcist Gil Spear straight forward.

The grey True Spirit now knew its target's location.

A milky-white gemstone shone at the end of the Exorcist Gil Spear that Ada held, which exposed her location. The two swords and the floating protective blades— all of the weapons thrust forward towards the gemstone.

And then……

—The black smoke cleared.

The girl and the True Spirit. Both of them stood frozen in a position with their weapons pointed at each other.

"……It's over."

Ada looked up at her enemy, which was close enough to touch.

She had definitely felt the tip of her Exorcist Gil Spear pierce the <Egg>.

On the other hand, the silver swords that the True Spirit had thrust out were all pointed at the wall far away from her.

"In this situation, if we had both struck each other, you would probably have won."

Where the weapons had pierced it, the wall shone with a faint milky-white light.

That was the fake target Ada had called out.

[……]

The True Spirit didn't respond. Ada had prepared a two-fold plan. As if it was praising her, the True Spirit simply stared at the Recitation light.

From the very beginning, what Ada had wanted from Neight was just the black smoke that resulted from a Recitation gone out of control. When all of their visions turned dark, the targets had become the light of the <Egg > and the shining gemstone on the tip of her Exorcist[Gil] Spear.

While Neight was Reciting, Ada had called out a white light similar to the glittering gem.

From the very start, White Recitations were Ada's speciality. The catalyst had been the pearl on the Exorcist Gil Spear, and as for the <Song of Praise Oratorio>—

'Make sure you sing the <Song of Praise Oratorio> loud enough that even the True Spirit can hear it!'

When Neight sang his <Song of Praise Oratorio> loudly, covered by the boy's voice, Ada had sung her own <Song of Praise Oratorio>. After that— While the True Spirit's swords aimed at the fake light of the spear, Ada had thrust her Exorcist Gil Spear at the <Egg>.

With a faint rustle, the sheets of metal that made up the True Spirit turned into fine dust and disappeared.

The remaining seven floating blades, the large swords that the True Spirit wielded, and the True Spirit's body all disappeared. Only the crumbling <Egg> with a hole pierced in it tumbled to the floor.

And then, at the same time……

Something very precious to Ada shattered loudly.

“Ada-san!”

With a vacant expression, Ada stood still. Chilled by the frightening thought that she might faint, Neight rushed up to her.

“Is your wound alright?”

“……I’m fine.”

She definitely shouldn’t be fine. The blood flowing down both her legs had already stained the tips of her shoes red.

However, she didn’t look like she was concerned about that. Instead, she gazed down by her feet.

She wasn’t looking at her blood-stained shoes. What she gazed at was something farther beyond that.

—Her Exorcist[Gil] Spear?

The tip of the Exorcist[Gil] Spear that Ada had spent around a dozen years together with was now shattered. Scattered on the floor were countless tiny shards of a broken blade.

"Chibi-kun, I'm sorry but do you mind going back to school before me?"

Ada sighed weakly.

"……But……"

"Please. I want 'us' to be alone."

Neight ran away towards the evacuation door.

A curtain of silence fell across the room. In it, Ada stood alone.

Closing her eyes, the girl Exorcist[Gillshe] hugged the shattered spear to her chest.

"……I'm sorry."

You were the one closest to me who protected me until now. I'm sorry for noticing it so late.

……I'm truly, truly sorry.

Part 4

Just how long had he been waiting for already?

Chilly waves lapped the sandy beach. Right now, he was standing somewhere between the branch school and the research institute. The sun that dyed the ocean red was now disappearing beyond the horizon. The waves which washed away grains of sand were becoming darker.

“The stars are coming out.”

Beside him, a girl with scarlet hair murmured. Compelled by her words, Neight looked up at the sky overhead.

The twinkling points of light reminded him of the shattered Exorcist Spear.

“I was really worried. And then you wandered off by yourself, of all things!”

Kluele had waited for him the whole time on the road leading back from the research institute.

“……I’m sorry.”

"But I'm glad you came back safely."

"U-Um, what about Kate-sensei?"

"We immediately took her to see a doctor, so she'll be fine. The other teachers are also going to have a quick checkup."

For several seconds, there was silence between them.

"……Sorry."

As if in harmony with the splashing waves, Kluele was the first to speak.

"I should be the one apologizing. I was troubled about my Recitations being scary, so I made you worry unnecessarily about something strange like that."

Looking up at the sky, she spread her arms wide open.

"But I'm fine now. After this, I'll be back to normal."

Normal. That was something that could be understood just by seeing her calm expression.

"I believed in Kluele-san ever since the very beginning ."

Before he could finish speaking those words……

"……Hey, Neight?"

With a mischievous smile— Kluele suddenly pinched both of his cheeks.

"O-Oww! Kwuewe-san, tha' huwts!"

"Ahaha. During times like these, you should just politely ask 'what is it?'"

"Whaa' ith it?"

"Yup, just like that."

Nodding with a satisfied look, Kluele let him go.

"……Aah, that was mean."

Neight reflexively pressed his hands to his cheeks…… And suddenly, he blinked repeatedly.

Eh? His cheeks didn't hurt at all, even though he had expected it to be painful just now.

"……Kluele-san, did you go easy on me?"

"What are you saying, isn't that obvious?"

Covering her mouth with her hand, the girl chuckled.

……I see.

Other than that, they had nothing more to say. In silence, they gazed at the ebb and flow of the waves—

Suddenly, the quiet noise of someone walking on sand could be heard on the beach.

"You'll catch a cold, both of you."

It was a tall girl with black hair. With her white Tremia school uniform fluttering in the wind, she slowly walked up to Neight and Kluele.

"……Serges-san?"

Looking back now, the beginning of everything had been— When Serges had told Neight about the Exorcist[Gillshe] girl practicing with her spear on the rooftop.

"U-Um, Serges-san?"

"What is it?"

The girl stood still, pushing aside her bangs that had been stuck together by the sea breeze.

"Did you know about Ada-san?"

"About her being an Exorcist[Gillshe]?"

……Like he thought, Serges had known everything from the very beginning.

"I'm probably the one who knows the most about her. More than any other student and any teacher."

Her expression suddenly turning gentle, Serges also looked up at the sky. She gazed beyond the clouds drifting overhead, beyond the twinkling stars— She gazed at something in the distant past that she could no longer return to.

"Ada was the same as you, Neighty."

The same as me?

"During the school entrance ceremony, she walked around quietly by herself. ……She had probably been thinking that she was too different compared to the rest of us. When I first talked to her, she ended up telling me a lot of things. It felt like she was so anxious that she couldn't help spilling everything."

—Ada-san had done that?

"She originally had a much brighter personality, which you probably can't imagine her with anymore. Back then, she held onto her precious long spear and gazed at me anxiously."

With a small laugh, Serges put her arms behind her back.

But then, she continued to speak in a quiet, unusually low voice.

"She looked like she needed someone to act like an older sister to her. I thought that she desperately needed a friend who she could fool around with."

Eh, 'someone'?

"Neighty, until you understand that, you'll still be ' Chibi-kun'. Right, Kluele?"

"Wait, what? Who do you mean by the role of the older sister?"

"……Even I don't know."

Letting out a sigh that was mixed with laughter, Serges walked lightly across the sandy beach.

In the direction she was heading—

With the starry night sky behind her, a short girl quietly walked towards them.

On her back, she carried a spear with a broken tip.

"……You idiot. You're so late that we were all worried ."

Gillshe

Saying that, the Reciter hugged her close Exorcist friend.

“Mmhm. Sorry about that. I’m alright now.”

Ada smiled weakly.

"That's an obvious lie."

"—Eh……"

One again, Sergies hugged Ada tightly.

"Didn't I tell you already? Fake smiles don't suit you. You need to express your mood more genuinely! It's fine to act cheerful when you're feeling up to it. But during painful times, rely on your friends more, okay?"

"……"

"Or am I not reliable enough?"

"……What are you saying? That's not true…… I'm just really happy."

—I'm glad that an Exorcist (I) came to a Recitation School (this school).

Her voice was choked with tears.

Mixed in with the splashing waves, it echoed quietly.

Interval Play - 2nd Act: Three Years Ago—

"I'm sorry, you two."

Putting the report down on his desk, the elderly man in charge of Tremia Academy sighed bitterly.

"I never expected there to be such a terrible situation."

"You aren't at fault for that, headmaster."

Mirror, who wore a blue lab coat, crossed his arms.

"A mysterious Recitation that turns people to stone. An <Egg> placed as a trap in the research institute. And the report also included the mysterious word 'Lastihyt' written in blood. All of these are things we don't fully understand yet. It's a stroke of good luck that the worst possible outcome didn't happen to the teachers and students."

"……Well, I guess you could put it that way."

"That's true."

Zessel shrugged and Enne nodded.

The research institute's staff members who had turned to stone had all been safely rescued and were undergoing a checkup at the medical facility. Although they were all weak at the moment, it was possible that they could be well enough to be interviewed a few days later. They should have witnessed what had happened in the institute that day.

"—I also did some investigating myself."

Mirror handed a thick bundle of paper to the headmaster.

"The fact that the research institute could successfully refine the <Egg> can be mainly accredited to one assistant."

"An assistant?"

Mirror nodded slightly at the headmaster, who was pondering over those words.

"Yes. It wasn't the head of the research institute or an official staff member, but just a hired assistant. That's why that person's name was never officially on record.

Even I have only been able to ascertain the existence of such an assistant, but been unable to find the person's name."

"……Hey, does that mean……"

Cutting off Mirror's words, Enne took a step forward.

In other words, so that their own name wouldn't be written down in the records, the person had purposely taken the role of a hired assistant. Had they used the institute's facilities just to refine the <Egg>?

"It could be thought of that way."

Pushing his glasses higher up on his nose, Miller agreed.

"That assistant left the research institute three years ago. The last clue I could find was that using the name of one of the institute's staff members, the assistant bought a train ticket to the Falna wastelands."

"Falna?"

Was that the name of a place? It was the first time Enne had heard the word before.

"To describe it briefly, it's an undeveloped piece of land. Or should I say, there are more wild animals living there than there are people. It's an enormous wasteland completely covered in grey sand."

—Grey sand?

Enne quietly frowned as she heard the headmaster's response. Beside her, Zessel also narrowed his eyes.

"……To put it a different way, three years ago, that assistant cut off all outside communications after arriving in the Falna wastelands."

Crossing his arms, Mirror continued speaking.

"Lastihyt. Come to think of it, Xins had also been searching for someone by that name…… If I recall correctly, that was also around three years ago."

Three years ago. Zessel's testimony matched perfectly with the situation.

That was when Xins had been searching for someone with the name Lastihyt.

That was also the time when communication had been cut off with the staff member who had refined the <Egg>.

“I should also mention, it was also three years ago when Xins mastered all five colors of Recitations.”

The headmaster murmured quietly as if talking to himself.

Was it just a coincidence? Or could it be—

While everyone in the room fell silent, the door suddenly opened.

The headmaster who stood in the middle of the room opened his eyes and saw a woman wearing a pale green suit.

“……Kate-kun.”

She was the female teacher who had gotten seriously injured protecting her students. She should have gotten intensive medical care a few days ago.

“Oi Kate, you should still be resting!”

"No, I appreciate your concern, but I'm fine."

She was stubborn. Bandages still peeped out from her suit collar and sleeve.

"Kate-kun, I'm sorry. ……And I need to thank you as well. If you hadn't risked your life to protect the students , who knows what might be happening right now."

The headmaster bowed, but Kate still had a gentle expression on her face.

"No…… Rather, I'm happy."

—Happy?

"I now understand that my student Ada…… No, that everyone in the class is a student who I can be proud of. As a teacher, there's no greater joy than knowing this."

Walking over to the window, Kate gazed at the empty campus.

"I look forward to the end of summer when I can meet my students again."

Her own figure was reflected in the windowpane. It seemed like she was also gazing at that—

“Summer break may only be a month long, but I have the feeling that within this short amount of time, the students will definitely continue to mature.”

Speaking those words, the young teacher smiled gently.

Awarded Play: Glory of the Singing Exorcists

Elite warriors—

Even though there were not many Exorcists[Gillshe], they were frequently needed. Among those— The founding Yung family, which was considered the most elite, was well-known all around the continent. They passed down skills and traditions, faced expectations to earn greater accomplishments, and were guaranteed to own public land and earn income above a certain level for a long time.

'It must be hard work for Senpai as well, isn't it?'

Klaus suddenly remembered the Rainbow Color Reciter's casual words.

Because of their abilities, they faced great expectations. Sometimes what was expected of them couldn't even be described by the word 'expectations', but were desires for them to go beyond the limits of their abilities. Their lives continually consisted of those kinds of days.

……Xins, sometimes I also want to suddenly drop everything and start travelling around the world, just like you.

But he had a wife and a child. Because he had chosen to start a family, he could no longer travel where he wished.

Rather than protecting the Yung family, he now fought to protect the day-to-day life of his own household.

"……Everyone has their own responsibilities."

Holding back a bitter sigh, Klaus walked towards the dining room of his mansion. It was a large mansion that housed only three people. No, now that his daughter was gone, only two.

He had already gotten used to the loneliness.

—Hm?

However, there were three chairs arranged around the dining table.

"Shouldn't Xins have left already?"

"Ada said she'd be coming back today."

His wife quickly replied from the kitchen without lifting her eyes from the boiling pot.

"……I see."

What was going on? Several days ago, they had received a letter stating that Ada would be coming back for summer break.

"Dear, about her being an Exorcist(Gillshe)—"

"Yeah, I know. I'll let her choose the path she wants."

He had already given up.

His daughter was sixteen. ……She was already at an age when parents shouldn't be barging in.

"I'll be in the garden until dinner's ready."

Carrying his Exorcist(Gil) Spear, Klaus walked towards the garden on their large piece of property.

Holding his spear but not swinging it around, Klaus gazed at the starlight overhead. The stars twinkled. Just like how the stars moved with the passing of time, people's ideals continued to change.

—Time.

It was the end of the time when parents restricted their child. It was time for the child to decide her own path. He didn't know if this time was truly a good thing, but he wanted to believe it was.

Suddenly, he heard faint footsteps walking across the lawn.

They weren't the familiar footsteps of his wife. Compared to hers, these steps were more subtle. They were footsteps that couldn't be heard by ordinary people — The footsteps of an Exorcist[Gillshe].

Klaus turned around and saw a short, tanned girl who he hadn't seen in a year. ……No, she had grown slightly taller.

—How odd. She looked extremely tired.

Ada walked weakly towards him with her shoulders drooping.

“Dinner’s almost ready. Mom said to come get you, so let’s go in.”

However, she stood there without moving.

“Dad, I have a favor to ask.”

A favor? How many times had his daughter said those words before?

“Can you……repair this?”

Ada held something long and thin in her right hand. She carefully unraveled the several layers of white cloth.

Klaus could see that inside the cloth were pieces of a broken Exorcist Gil Spear, as well as shards of a shattered gemstone.

“If I repair it, what are you planning to do with it?”

“Are you asking me because you truly don’t know?”

Klaus's breath caught in his throat at the unexpected rebuttal.

"……Simply repairing it is something I can do. But even after it's repaired, this Exorcist Gil Spear shouldn't be used anymore."

Why? The look in Ada's eyes asked.

"You should already know. Exorcist Gil Spears are made to precise specifications. After it's this shattered, it'll be difficult to restore it completely back to the way it was before. The repaired spear will have a different weight and length, so it won't be the Exorcist Gil Spear you're used to."

If she were to use the spear according to the attributes she was familiar with, it would definitely cause a fatal mistake. Even if it was repaired, the spear couldn't become like a part of her body anymore.

"Everyone's been down this path before. —Even me."

"……I won't accept that."

She didn't scream or shout, but hidden in her words was something that hadn't been there a year ago when they had argued in Klaus's room.

"I won't accept something ridiculous like 'everyone's been down that path before'……That's why I wanted to study to become a Reciter."

"Then are you going to continue your studies as a Reciter?"

For an instant, Ada was speechless.

"I will. But……"

Klaus could tell that the girl had tightened her grip on the Exorcist[Gil] Spear.

"But, I also…… don't want to stop being an Exorcist[Gillshe]."

A Reciter and an Exorcist[Gillshe].

One who calls things out and one who sends them back.

She had chosen two completely opposite paths.

"Do you know just how difficult that will be?"

"I know. But, I've already decided."

Their gazes met. Usually Ada would be the first one to turn away, but this time she looked up steadily at her father.

—The color of her eyes is similar to yours. Stubborn yet sincere.

Klaus remembered the words his wife had said to him when their daughter had been born. Back then, he had been embarrassed and could only respond vaguely.

"I can't guarantee that I can repair it."

He sighed loudly—

He took the broken Exorcist Gil Spear out of the hands of the astonished girl.

"……Eh?"

"If this spear is a part of you, then I consider it my daughter as well."

"T-Then!"

His daughter's voice perked back up. Really, how many years had it been since he had seen such a happy expression on her face?

"But I have a condition. For the rest of summer vacation, you must stay here and always hold onto your spear."

In order to familiarize herself with the weight of the repaired spear to an accuracy of 0.1 grams.

In order to familiarize herself with the length of the repaired spear to an accuracy of 0.1 millimeters.

She needed to make corrections to the Exorcist Gil Spear's characteristics that she was familiar with, the characteristics which had seeped into the marrow of her bones after sixteen years of practice. Just how many days and how much practice would it take? His daughter should definitely know how rigorous it would be.

"……I won't run away."

How many times had he heard her say those words before?

—But this time, it didn't seem to be a complete lie.

"I'm going back inside. Mom's probably waiting for me."

"Ada."

Klaus directed his words to the girl's back.

"Were you able to protect what was precious to you?"

For an instant, he could see a hesitant color in the depths of her eyes. His daughter smiled bitterly and shrugged.

"I couldn't have done it by myself."

"You don't need to shoulder everything by yourself. After all, don't you have good friends in the Recitation School?"

"……I know that."

Ada stated curtly. Seeing the look on her face as she pretended to be strong, Klaus smiled wryly from the bottom of his heart.

"Ah, is that so?"

He ruffled the hair of the stubborn girl.

"Hey! Dad, don't treat me like a child!"

Even though she was pouting—

His daughter didn't push away his hand.

'……Hey, Dad.'

What is it?

'Why did you want to become an Exorcist(Gillshe)?'

What a sudden question.

'Just tell me already.'

A long time ago, I worked together with a certain Reciter. That person was skilled but acted recklessly. If I left her alone, something would definitely go wrong.

'—And then?'

And sure enough, something happened a while later. She confronted a wild Recited creature all by herself to try and stop it. As expected, she ended up getting severely injured. If I hadn't run over to help her, who knows what might have happened.

'Is that the reason?'

That was probably the first time I saved someone. It was the first time I was glad to be an Exorcist[Gillshe].

'That Reciter you saved, is she someone I know?'

Ada, did you forget what your mom used to work as?

'……'

Was that a boring story?

'……No. Although it wasn't very satisfying, I think it was a lovely story.'

—So this was why nobody came to eat dinner after she waited so long.

Peering at the figures of her daughter and husband from a shadowed part of the garden, the woman who had once been a Reciter smiled to herself.

Her daughter had come home and for the first time in a while, they could spend summer vacation together as a complete family. It would be very lively this summer, wouldn't it?

Round Play: Three Years Ago *Lastihyt ; miquvy Wer shela -c-nixer arsa*

It was a land covered endlessly by gravel that was a grey color similar to human bones.

The wind howled in a low, gloomy voice reminiscent of the wails of the dead. Blown by sudden gusts of wind, the gravel on the ground pelted skin. —It was a place that even travelers rarely visited, a wasteland where the influence of humans did not reach.

In the wasteland, a single woman with glossy black hair stood perfectly still.

On her shoulder was a jet-black lizard. The lizard was also as still as a rock, not making even the subtlest of movements.

—It was as if the two of them had been frozen.

An elderly man wearing a robe the color of yellow sand slowly walked closer to the woman, who motionlessly looked up at the sky.

"Greetings."

The woman did not respond. She simply continued to gaze up at the sky.

She gazed beyond the shredded clouds that flowed overhead and beyond the dust-colored sky. She simply gazed fixedly at something above her.

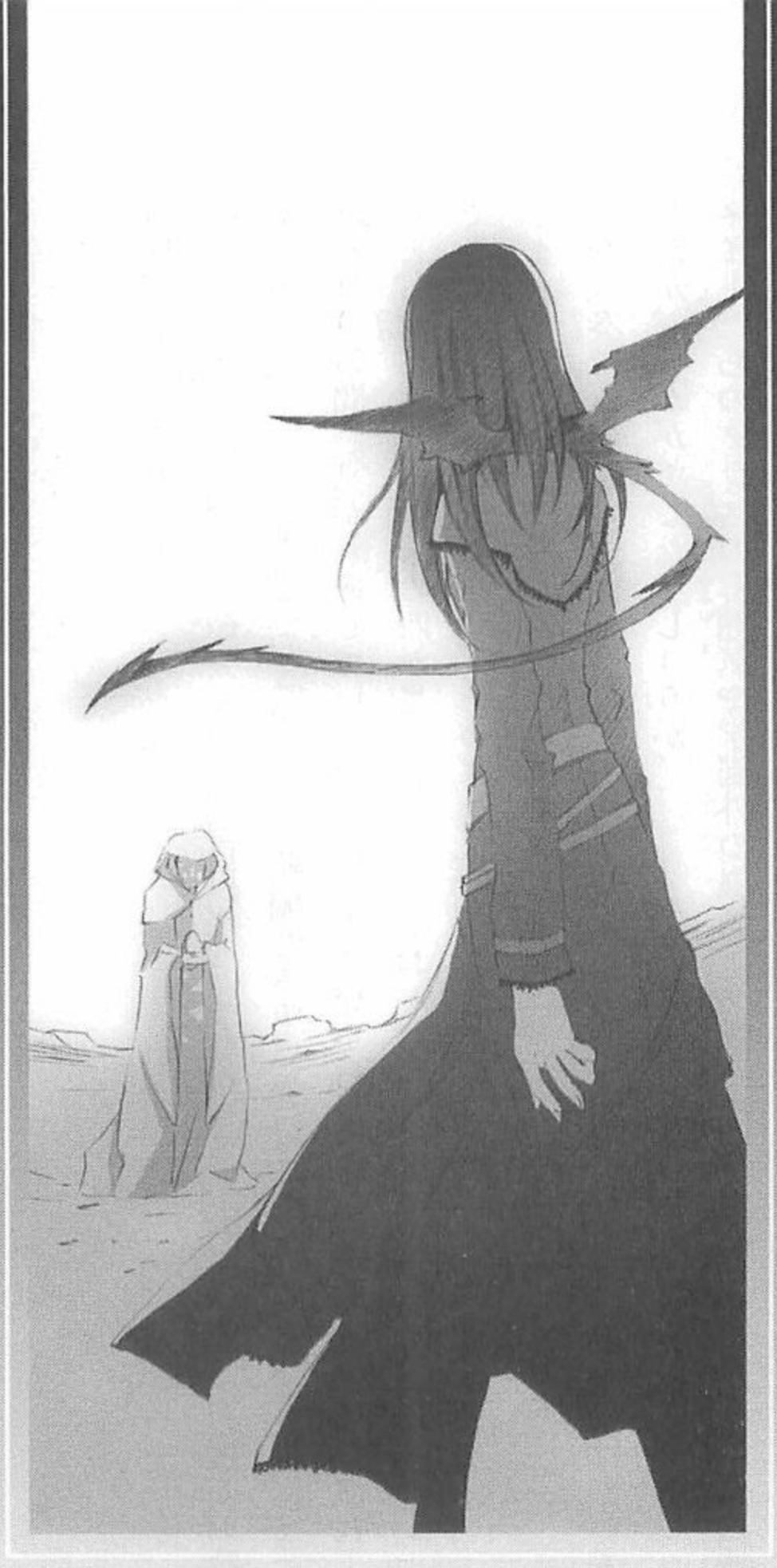
"I have been searching for you."

The elderly man greeted her a second time.

The woman did not respond.

"May I call you Evhemary?"

"……"



The first thing to move was the lizard on her shoulder. It stared at the elderly man with a scowl, as if sizing up the value of his existence.

Then, after easily a few minutes had passed—

The woman slowly turned to face the elderly man.

"……Who are you?"

Hearing that question, the elderly man made a strange expression that seemed like he was both smiling and crying.

"—Lastihyt. You may call me that."

He took something out of the pocket of his sandy-yellow robe.

Lying on his palm was a gemstone emitting a grey glow.

A gemstone? No.

It was ovular, a shape that the structure of a gemstone couldn't form— It was something in the shape of an egg.

The strange gemstone emitted a silver-grey light.

“O Evhemary, Night Color Reciter. I would like to hear your song.”

Afterword

Long time no see, everyone.

It's been four months since 'Evhe Smiles At Dawn' was published in January. Thanks to many warm voices of support, I was able to start writing the second volume of the 'Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai' series.

Four months. Whether it's because my sense of time has become numb or time flowed mercilessly without my knowing— Strangely, I always felt impatient during these four months. ……It's odd, I shouldn't have been lazing around…… Ah…… I wonder…… I might have been lazy after all (timidly)

Well, aside from a lazy person's confessions—

The second volume, 'The Path of the Songstress'— I personally classify it as a novel about classmates, but what did you think?

The atmosphere in the class of Neight and his friends, the scenery outside the campus, civilization. Moreover, there appeared a special job other than Reciters called Exorcists, as well as songs with a different feel than those

Gillshe

of the first volume. Both are part of the ‘outside world’ not described in the first volume, but are things I wanted to portray even before the previous volume was published.

This time, I carefully aimed for an atmosphere similar to the one ‘Evhe’ had, yet also slightly different. I would be happy if you enjoyed it.

……But even though I say it is a novel about classmates, by the time I realized, it had completely turned into a story with Exorcists Gillshe as the main focus. I feel like it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to call it an Ada-themed novel.

Editor K-sama: “Sazane-san, you like Ada, don’t you?”

He had bluntly pointed out. ……T-That’s wrong. Rather, it’s because of Klaus (eh?)

After all— just like the first volume, each and every character that appears in ‘Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai’ has an important scene. Furthermore, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that this is a story where the scenes when each character became a main character are compiled into a complete volume.

This second volume was about Ada. I'm sure there are some people who have noticed, but to prepare for Ada being the main character of the second volume, even though Neight's classmates weren't described very much at all in the first volume, only Ada showed her face in various places.

The protagonists of this story are Neight and Kluele, but they are sometimes helped by Xins, the other teachers and adults, and sometimes other classmates around them. I would be happy if you would warmly watch over them as they gradually grow from here on.

—Also, I will explain a little about the third volume that will be published in July.

There was an old promise made by Night and Rainbow. The next volume will be a story revolving around that 'old promise'.

The second volume showed a bit of the situation in the outside world.

The third volume will continue the story that has been progressing until now.

What I truly mean is that the following books will finally feel like they have the theme of a Twilight-colored Song User. There was the old promise, and after crossing over a long span of time, there is a new promise. That theme, which could be called the 'New Testament', will the focus of the third volume.

The third volume— It is a story about the new songs and promises created by the 'Night-colored boy'. I hope to gradually uncover the mysteries and questions left over from the stories up to this point, so I would be glad if you would follow along with me.

<Information about the publishing of the short story>

The second volume in May. The third volume in July. Between this two-month publishing interval— are the three months May, June, and July.

Within these three months, I will publish a short story about 'Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai' in Fujimi Bunko's ' Monthly Dragon Magazine'.

Planned schedule for 2007:

May: Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai II published

The first part and special feature serialized in ‘Monthly Dragon Magazine July Edition’

June: The second part serialized in ‘Monthly Dragon Magazine August Edition’

July: Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai III published

The third part serialized in ‘Monthly Dragon Magazine September Edition’

—It will be something like that. You may check for the detailed schedule in bookstores and other such locations. It will also be on my home page and blog, so please check that as well.

Three months of serializations mean that it will be a short story with three parts. What the story is about should be obvious. I have been worrying about the publishing order and I am currently in the middle of working on it. Sometimes I feel like saying things like ‘……There’s no way that I can make it in time,’ but I will try my best. (I actually mutter that to myself every night, but please keep it a secret)

By the way, as for the first serialization, it is an episode that will take place between the second and third volumes. Additionally, because it will have a significant number of pages, please definitely look forward to it.

About the second and third parts…… The plot is a secret, but nearly all of the characters we've encountered so far will be in it. These are all episodes that I was unable to write into the main storyline, so I would be glad if you could enjoy them as much as the main volumes.

* Additionally, if you could write 'Tasogare-iro no Uta Tsukai was interesting' on Dragon Magazine's reader survey postcards and send them off, I would be extremely grateful! (straightforward)

—Well, I'll end my self-promotions here—

<From the time when I finished writing the first volume until now>

I said so in the beginning as well, but I have received a lot of letters and emails with your comments and I truly thank you very much. I treat each and every response

very preciously. I reread them about once every week. A fair number of characters have appeared since the first volume and a wide variety of them are liked by readers. I am truly happy that you guys like so many of the characters. As for popularity, many readers voted for the Night-colored flying lizard, which makes him (it) very happy. (It might even make the top three)

……Would you be fine with a lizard standing on the podium, all of you humans?

……Also, are you fine with how the story is going so far?

<Lastly>

As the second volume is currently being published, I have relied on a truly large number of people to have made it here. Firstly, the lead editor K-sama has carefully checked the manuscript over and over again and polished the work. Like in the first volume, Takeoka Miho-sama has drawn beautiful illustrations for this volume as well.

Both of you, thank you very much for finding time in your busy schedules to help me.

When I caught a cold and stayed in bed for a week, my family supported me in various ways.

And also, more than anyone, thank you to those of you who have read the first volume and continued onto the second one.

Thank you very much. I will continue trying my best from here on, so I hope that you would please continue to support me.

* P.S. To everyone who sent me an email or a letter

Whether it's by email or a letter, I will try my best to reply to you within three months from now. If you still have not received a reply in three months, please remind me with an email or a comment on my blog, which you can find the link to below, and I will reply as soon as possible. Please continue supporting me from here on.

Well then. I pray that we can meet again in the short story and in the third volume—

Thank you very much for having volume two in your possession right now.

On a certain day in March, while listening to ‘Souheki no Mori’ by Shikata Akiko—

Sazane Kei

HP: “Room of Fine Noise” http://members2.jcom.home.ne.jp/0445901901/[2]

Translation Notes

1. ↑ Literally written as two-headed viper. In Greek mythology, the amphisbaena are two-headed ant-eating serpents that spawned from the blood dripping from Medusa's head.
2. ↑ This link doesn't work anymore. The author's blog is now at http://sazane.exblog.jp/